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CHRISTIAN DOUBT

by

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FOR MY MOTHER

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INTRODUCTION

OF the many curious turns of Kierkegaard's whimsical fancy, I can think of none more instructively amusing than his Parable of the Tame Geese.[1] Asking us to imagine that the geese could talk, he demands further that we suppose they had arranged their religious worship at which every Sunday they assembled; one of the ganders preached. The fundamental theme of the sermon was the lofty destiny of the geese and the high goal set before them by their Creator. (Every time this word was mentioned the geese curtsied and the ganders bowed the head.) By the aid of wings they could fly away to distant, blessed climes, their proper home, for here they were but strangers. So it was every Sunday. And as soon as the assembly broke up each waddled home to his own affairs. And then the same next Sunday; they throve, became plump and delicate, and were duly eaten on Martinmas Eve. That was all. For on Mondays they were ready to recount to one another what befell a goose that had seriously experimented with the wings to which the preacher had alluded: it was a terrible death, they whispered; and so indeed it was. But they did not speak about that on Sundays, for this, said they, would have been unseemly, making a farce of their divine worship and of their Belief. Among the geese there were, however, some who seemed to be suffering and growing thin. "There !" said the geese, on a Monday. "You see what happens when flying is taken seriously? It is because they are fretting about and pining for this that they get thin, don't thrive, and don't have the Grace of God as do we who therefore become plump and delicate." And the next

[1] Kierkegaard, *Efterladte Papirer*, p. 345 f., quoted by Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 544 f.

Sunday they went again to divine worship; and again the old gander preached about the wings and the high goal set before the geese by the Creator; and here again the geese curtsied and the ganders bowed the head.

This story is called by its author "a revivalistic meditation," and he foretells that someone will read it and remark how pretty a tale it is; will waddle home to his affairs; will become (or at least try with all his might to become) plump, delicate and fat; and on Sunday when the parson preachifies, will hearken—like the fat geese.

It cannot be said that the fat geese did not believe; yet their believing did nothing to mitigate their Martinmas shame. They lacked the sense of wonder which prompted the venturesome goose to try her wings and disturbed the conventional career of some others. Evidently the two classes of geese believed in very different ways, and it was a reflection such as this which first led me to consider the question which I propose to discuss in the following pages. It is a question arising out of Christian experience, and I write about it accordingly. That wonder is the beginning of philosophy, a Socratic view expressed in the *Theætetus* and elsewhere, would be generally admitted. Doubt is the starting-point of genuine thought; wonder, as Bacon said, is the seed of knowledge. All true lovers of wisdom must be eager to break down presuppositions and prejudices, not least their own, and it would be widely conceded by thinkers of every school that to think otherwise is hardly to think at all. On the other hand, it is widely supposed that religion fundamentally differs from philosophy in that it disallows such agnosticism, presenting its adherents with axioms in the form of doctrinal propositions beyond or above dispute. I am concerned here to dispute such a view and to try to exhibit the nature of the misunderstanding which underlies it. Lovers of Pascal will not go far with me before perceiving how much his notion of the antinomy of faith and

doubt has influenced my thought; mine is indeed a very Pascalian theme.

There is an old legend that Jesus once said to his disciples: "Look with wonder at the things which are before you." But this is a precept which the most sceptical philosopher would be ready to commend; and the modern scientist with a negligible interest in religion would seem often to obey it more eagerly than many of the churchgoers who curtsy with the fat geese or incline with the fat ganders. If ordinary reflection on empirical observation so effectively stimulates wonder, doubt, and other such philosophic dispositions, it may well be questioned whether that exceedingly prevalent kind of wonderless Christianity which Kierkegaard called "finite from end to end" be Christianity at all. Genuine Christianity, whatever it is, cannot leave less room for wonder than does empirical science. Wonder and doubt are implicates of faith, and as faith increases so must they. If one believes that water ever behaved in accordance with the record of the miracle in Cana, one may be expected to wonder more at that situation than in the presence of a chemical substance which one believes to be approximately H_2O; yet while this happens to some persons who profess Christian belief, it does not happen to many others of the same profession, so that it is worth while inspecting the term "belief" for a possibly very serious ambiguity.

My theme emerges from any consideration of the implications of faith as an attitude of the human mind, and it is therefore by no means necessarily a Christian theme, for neither doubt nor wonder nor faith may be said to be an exclusively Christian notion. But since Christian faith purports to be quite peculiar, and since it is that aspect of my theme presented by specifically Christian experience which I particularly want to investigate, it will be my concern to try to exhibit how Christian doubt and wonder differ from other kinds of wonder and doubt. For the fat

as well as the thin geese wondered: they wondered, for example, at the lack of common sense, the tactlessness, of the rash goose, as indeed they would have wondered, one may presume, at a gander who curtsied or a goose who bowed the head, or at either who did neither. But the rash goose wondered in a different way; and this difference merits some special investigation. There is little disagreement among thinkers about the morally disastrous effects of lack of doubt and wonder; but in a Christian context persistence in such a disposition may be said to be the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, alone without hope of pardon—a very different notion and one which will have an important place in the discussion.

Since I am among the many Christians whom the disunity of Christendom particularly distresses, two chapters of my essay are devoted to a consideration of this and the problem of Christian reconciliation. I hope very much that no reader will misunderstand my motive when I call attention to the extreme complexity of this problem and the profound difficulties underlying it. It is because of an acute consciousness of the gravity of the situation and of the urgent need for genuine reconciliation that I attack what seem to me to be the much too facile and inadequate programmes of some contemporary œcumenical movements. Any reader who should suppose me to be grinding some sectarian axe would certainly be so gravely misunderstanding my book as to make it a pity that he had ever read it. For it is one of my main purposes to show that only by making Christian faith more genuine can we hope to foster genuine reconciliation, and that the need so to enrich and enliven our faith is a very general one. I hope there is no Christian society which would wish me to refrain from proclaiming this need.

Philosophy is not religion, nor religion philosophy; but I think we are unlikely ever to stress too much the necessity

of exploring the relation between them. We are to consider an important aspect of this relation. My intention is to show that, while doubt is that attitude with which every lover of wisdom must begin his quest, it is for the Christian the indispensable concomitant of the faith which carries him beyond it.

CHAPTER I

DOUBT AS AN IMPLICATE OF FAITH

SINCE there is considerable ambiguity both in English and in other languages in the use of terms fundamental to the proposed discussion, it is important to begin with tentative definitions. Much misunderstanding arises in the use of the words, "I believe," which serve not only to refer to both the sensory or æsthetic and abstract or logical modes of cognition on the one hand, but on the other also to express any of the innumerable series of gradations lying between the slightest disposition to affirm and the most resolute moral determination to do so, that is, to express opinion. To opine, Kant taught, is to hold as true, in the consciousness that to do so is subjectively insufficient, while to believe is subjectively sufficient; but common usage neglects this distinction more often than it recognizes it. Outside the judicial bench we seldom claim only to opine, and so "belief" has to serve both purposes. But even greater is the confusion between the application of the term "belief" to all such cognitive factors in experience and its application to "feeling." There is moreover a notorious ambiguity in the latter term, which psychologists traditionally restrict to the affective states of pleasure and pain but which popular usage applies to such a wide variety of mental functions that there is scarcely any emotion, intuition or sensation to which it is unidiomatic, in everyday usage, to apply the words "I feel." Since I may feel both toothache and the accuracy of a mathematical equation, both the moral injustice of an Act of Parliament and the perfume of violets or savour of roast beef, both the emotional responsiveness of a crowd and the appositeness of a poetic expression, and

since I may use the term "belief" in respect of anything which I feel, cognize or opine, to affirm one's belief does not ordinarily delineate one's attitude to an object in any way helpful to an understanding of what this attitude may be. "I believe" may even be used conatively, that is to say, it may denote a determination of the will to focus the attention on some field within which, it is postulated, may reside an object towards which any of the attitudes already mentioned may be held with advantage to the holder. It is in this sense that people affirm belief in taking exercise or a cup of tea: they do not profess to have developed any particular attitude to exercise or tea, but rather announce their intention of exploring or continuing to explore the benefits which in one way or another may accrue from the pursuits in question. The proposition "I believe in God and the Church and the Bible" means not seldom, in such usage: "I am willing (in spite of the indubitable facts that God does not exist, that Churches are but remnants of outworn social systems, and that the Bible is an inferior example of a collection of mythological literature) to consider the practical benefits which may accrue, in the present circumstances of civilization, from any attitude widely held or pretended to be held to these objects; indeed I shall strongly oppose with every political and other weapon at my disposal all attempts to impede people from having whatever attitude they prefer to have to such matters; nay more, such is my conviction about what I have been saying that I shall unflinchingly bear all misunderstanding and reproach on this question, even should I be taunted by some with being 'a believer'."

Conversely, there are many conventional ways of expressing attitudes of belief, some of which are recounted in the story that, when a bishop, a vicar and a curate intended to express the same kind of certitude, the bishop said "Brethren, I have a profound conviction," the vicar "My

friends, one does get the feeling," and the curate "Men, I *know*." It is indisputable, however, that all these expressions convey a measure of psychological certitude, and that it is not necessarily intended that this certitude be logically certifiable. The distinction which Dr. F. R. Tennant proposes to draw between "certitude" and "certainty" is relevant and practically helpful: he suggests that we should make use of these two terms to distinguish between the objective character of "it is certain . . ." (certainty) and the psychological conviction of "I am certain that . . ." (certitude). I may say, especially in a religious context, that I am as certain that Christ is risen as that two and two are four; but in such a case I am comparing my certitude about the Resurrection with my certitude about mathematical or logical certainty. Certitude and certainty, in this proposed usage, are as incomparable as are chocolate and the process of eating it. One may relate the one to the other, even identify the one with the other, should one's theory of knowledge lead one to do this; but to admit or imply the distinction and proceed as if there were no distinction is plainly intolerable.

Certitude is an antonym for incertitude, and incertitude is a synonym for doubt. The English word "doubt" is derived from the Latin "dubito" frequentative of Old Latin "dubo" (*duo*, two, *bhū*, to be, or *bhē*, to seem—Aryan roots), so that etymologically "to doubt" is "to be of two minds," "to stand at the cross-roads." This character of duality may be seen also in the German equivalent *zweifeln* (*zwei*, two). But "doubt" is variously used; apart from the archaic and dialectal use in English,[1] ambiguities often obscure the fundamental sense of the term. It is commonly used in antithesis to faith, as unbelief to belief: we are said to doubt the truth of a proposition, the quality of a fabric, the age of a wine, when we

[1] As in *Hamlet*, "I doubt some foul play." Cf. Chaucer, "Oonly for the doute of Ihesu Crist."

do not believe what is affirmed about them. In religious literature a similar antithesis appears: a doubter is one who has not religious faith. Such ambiguity abounds in the English New Testament. In the Gospels alone, not only is the term used in English to translate several different Greek terms, but these are not always rendered by it. So we have "doubt" meaning "religious faith which hesitates,"[1] while in other passages it means "perplexity" or "wondering."[2] In other places it refers to a moral failure to take personal action in religious matters, the failure of the man who considers these and yet does nothing about the result of his intellectual investigations;[3] here it is a reproach implying an absence of faith which is contrasted unfavourably with the power of faith. Nevertheless, in spite of all such obscurities, both in religious and general contexts, "doubt" retains some measure of its fundamental meaning: to doubt is to have a critical attitude of mind, to look in two directions, to consider alternatives.

The terms "belief" and "faith" have commonly been identified, apart from the strong tendency to restrict the latter term in such a way as to give it a religious flavour or at any rate make it easily linked with religion. In the usage which I would propose, "faith," though intimately connected with "having certitude" and with cognition generally, has certain implicates which can be claimed for none of the many senses in which "belief" may be used. An act of faith, however it may be grounded in cognition, is a practical act implying moral choice. This does not necessarily mean that a choice between having faith and not having

[1] E.g., *Matt.* xiv. 31: "wherefore didst thou doubt?" (*εἰς τί ἐδίστασας*); *Luke* xii. 29: "neither be ye of doubtful mind" (*καὶ μὴ μετεωρίζεσθε*).

[2] E.g., *John* xiii. 22: "the disciples looked one on another, doubting (*ἀπορούμενοι*) of whom he spake."

[3] E.g., *Mark* xi. 23: "whosoever shall say unto this mountain . . .; and shall not doubt (*καὶ μὴ διακριθῇ*) in his heart . . .; he shall have whatsoever he saith."

faith has actually been made, for it is true that a child m
have faith before it is capable of making a fully responsib
moral choice. But while belief, in the cognitive sense, beir
in fact simply cognitive or pseudo-cognitive, has no conati
implicates at all, faith, even that of the child or primiti
savage, involves the assumption of moral responsibili
commensurate with a growing capacity to discharge
That is to say, a child may make an act of faith in his fath
of a kind which prompts him both to affirm that his fath
is the cleverest and the kindest man in the whole worl
and also to depend on his father as such, long before t
child is in any way capable of investigating what his clai
means. It may turn out that the father is in fact only t
cleverest and kindest man in the village in which the chi
lives; but the growing child can very well vindicate h
faith by admitting to himself his mistake about the extent
the world, for he was right in his original estimate of h
father's cleverness and kindness in relation to the clevern
and kindness of the other villagers. A child of six may ha
faith in God; but if so he is not relieved of the responsibili
of determining, *pari passu* with the development of h
capacity to do so, whether on the one hand his faith be a
longer in any way tenable, and on the other whether
ground has been adequately conceived; he must be prepare
that is to say, to revise the character of his faith as his whc
personality develops, in such a way that it becomes evide
that moral responsibility is involved at every step. Howev
minute may have been the moral responsibility involv
in the original act of faith it is never a responsibili
which ceases to develop so long as he continues to adhe
to his faith.

It is in this sense that I would maintain that faith, contr
distinguished from belief, implies doubt. It is only wh
faith means no more than simple credulity that it has n
doubt as an implicate, and since simple credulity is in fa

a theoretical notion which is in practice psychologically possible only in proportion to one's moral irresponsibility, it may be said that, generally and practically speaking, doubt is an implicate of faith. But before developing this view it is necessary to note certain characteristics of faith and also some ambiguity which is to be found even in this term. Though frequently associated with religion, it is not necessarily always so used, and though the Christian use of the term generally implies the leaning of the entire human personality on God, even the "faith" of the New Testament[1] sometimes retains the older meaning of "intellectual conviction." Faith may also mean, for instance, that important factor in the conduct of the ordinary business of life, the attitude of mind which enables us, by reason of trust which we put in certain persons, and indirectly in certain ideas or objects, to attain our desires, perform our duties, achieve our moral ends. I know what it is to have faith in a teacher, a pupil, a doctor, a servant, a postman. That I may be said to have faith in a dictionary or an aeroplane is due respectively to my having faith in the author or publisher of the work and the manufacturer and pilot of the aircraft. I am told that I may cure myself of certain psychological and other inhibitions or disabilities by means of auto-suggestion, a "faith-cure"; but this is to say that faith in myself will effect my cure; a cure by hetero-suggestion would similarly involve my having faith in the person assisting in my cure. In legal practice, some contracts require *bona fides*, others *uberrima fides*; but the faith is in every case faith in a person. Faith is indeed always ultimately personal, and theistic faith is certainly no exception, for it can be evoked only to the extent that God is conceived as personal. Where religion postulates an impersonal God, there can be no theistic faith, since there is no person to whom to direct it; there is rather a claim to a special kind of knowledge, a theosophy rather than a faith

[1] πίστις.

responsive to divine revelation. Theoretically, at any rate, one could even conceive oneself to be divine and direct religious faith to oneself; what one could not do even in theory is to direct faith to anything without any reference to a personal object of faith.

As there is no conception of religious faith more subtle or complex than the Christian one, it will be profitable to devote attention to this, as I propose to do, more than to any other, in considering the faith of which doubt is held to be an implicate. To the God of Christian faith is attributed infinite love, wisdom and power; in the terminology of a less ancient mode of thought he has been called Absolute Value. All this implies profound doubt concerning the ordinary suppositions of mankind, as does also, *ex hypothesi*, every such article of faith. In the very act of affirming a "lively faith" that, say, I shall live for ever, I am doubting the more customary postulate that I shall cease to live within the next fifty years. The validity of the grounds on which I might base my faith in my personal immortality need not now concern us; whether they are compatible with reason, "above" reason, or the fruit of a hallucination attending mental derangement of some kind, is at present beside the point. What is indisputable is that my act of faith is impossible, even in the widest sense of the term "faith," except to the extent that it stands in some relation or other to rational activity. Indeed it is perhaps this which most patently distinguishes acts of faith from ordinary habits of mind, the conscious or subconscious presuppositions of conventional discourse. Were it commonly held that miracles contrary to a generally settled order of nature very frequently occurred, no act of faith would be necessary for believing that one might presently take place; only a question of probability would have to be raised, since it had been already established as a habit of mind (*a*) that there is a settled order of nature, and (*b*) that numerous

exceptions to it may be expected as a matter of course. And if it were held that the notion of such an established order of nature, to which there might or might not be exceptions, was itself an otiose superstition, and that all events were wholly unpredictable, it would plainly be unnecessary to make an act of faith concerning any event, since the entirely arbitrary and capricious working of the universe would have been placed *ex hypothesi* beyond doubt. It is only because belief in an established order of nature so regular that exceptions to it demanded a "supernatural" explanation was widely held, that belief in miracles was associated with faith in a divine Being: so regular was the working of nature deemed to be that it needed faith in a God capable of overruling nature to make belief in the miraculous even intellectually possible in a sane adult.

I do not think that anything which can be and is held as matter of course, that is, indubitably, can meaningfully be said to demand an act of faith. To suppose otherwise seems to me to be the result of a psychological misunderstanding.[1] The Middle Ages have been called by Romantics "the ages of faith;" but either this is a gratuitous insult to mediæval faith in God, implying, for example, that this was not in fact faith but rather the result of an over-credulous disposition, an inclination to believe anything and act on such belief, or else it says that

> Faith is a kind of parasitic plant,
> That grasps the nearest plant with tendril-rings;
> And as the climate and the soil may grant,
> So is the sort of tree to which it clings.[2]

For faith in the sense which I intend it to have cannot come

[1] Professor Laird sometimes uses the noun "faith" in the sense of that which "frequently precedes . . . belief" (John Laird, *Knowledge, Belief and Opinion* (New York, Century Co., 1930), Bk. iv. Ch. xx. § 8, Faith and Doubt, p. 489 sq.). To the extent that it does this it has no doubt in it, being, as Laird says it may be (*idem*, p. 495), "blind and barbaric."

[2] Thomas Hood, *Ode to Rae Wilson.*

more easily to one generation than to another. Nor is it easier for children than for older people; and that even small children are capable of it is possible only because they are already moral agents, that is, because moral responsibility has had a beginning. In children faith is however more urgently necessary, as we shall presently see. But the humbleness of moral capacity or strength cannot be said to diminish the struggle involved in moral action, and the effort required to make an act of faith which is only the beginning of faith is not necessarily less than that which is required to sustain and develop it. If children can have genuine religious faith, as I think they can, this faith implies doubt, too, though it can be a doubt not fully unfolded. A child's faith looks easier to many adults than does their own, as mediæval faith looked easier to the Romantics than did theirs; but as great art conceals art, great faith may conceal its implicates from the vulgar eye.

Of course, presuppositions which might be *formally* the grounds of acts of faith could be held without any exercise of the will and with no very serious reflection at all. A community of people might hold it to be a matter of course that the seraphim were exactly nine feet in height or that the gates of Hell were situated exactly four and a half miles due east of Istanbul. No acts of faith would be necessarily associated with such beliefs. It is perhaps not logically impossible that the beliefs might be "true"; but so might many of the superstitions and work-a-day presuppositions which have been held by mankind, such as that the sun moves round the earth, or that cloven-footed witches ought to be burned alive.[1] One might, however, doubt the propriety of burning cloven-footed witches without doubting their existence, and one might suspect that the sun did not move round the earth, but rather the earth round the sun,

[1] I am here assuming, of course, that moral propositions such as the one about the witches are logically meaningful.

without doubting in the least whether it were meaningful to talk about the solar system in such terms. As soon as there is a vestige of doubt, belief is endowed with a new character; and to the extent that doubt is absent faith cannot emerge.

Faith must walk where it cannot see.[1] It is true that from its own standpoint it bestows its own assurance, resulting in immense confidence on the part of the agent; but in every act of faith there must be an element of risk. Without this element of risk, faith, deprived of its essential character, would cease to be faith. Where there is logical certainty there is no need, indeed no place, for faith,[2] and from the logical standpoint to make an act of faith is to take a risk, Yet in view of faith's own certitude, this element of risk could have no place in faith, unless doubt were one of faith's implicates. It would be trifling humbug to suggest that because a Christian martyr's faith in God was so strong that he was able to sing hymns of rejoicing on his way to agony and premature death, he was devoid of all sense of risk, wholly untroubled by the possibility of his being an outstanding fool to endure such agony and give up his life with its joys for the sake of an illusory ideal. Of course the martyr faces this risk: it is part of his act of faith; and to the extent that the risk is eliminated the faith must vanish. In willing to believe sufficiently in the trustworthiness of an ex-convict to lend him fifty pounds without security, I should be taking a risk in making this moral choice; for not only might I accept in the first place the general opinion of my friends that it would be folly to trust him at all, but (this is peculiarly significant in a description of faith) I might well doubt whether my friends were right in their

[1] St. Augustine, *Ioannis Evang. Tract.*, c. 40, § 8: "Quid est enim fides nisi credere quod non vides?"

[2] St. Gregory, *Homil.* 40: "Fides non habet meritum ubi humana ratio praebet experimentum."

judgment without making up my mind to risk on him a sum I could ill afford to lose.

Though doubt is an implicate of faith, not even the particular kind of doubt which faith implies necessarily results in faith; the moral choice of undertaking the risk is also an implicate of every practical act of faith at every level, from faith in the local water-suppliers to faith in the Holy Trinity. What is universally admitted by theologians to be true of soteriological faith, that it implies the response of the whole human personality, tends to hold in some measure of all faith. It is important to recognize at the outset the diversity of faith's implicates in order justly to appreciate and fully to understand the nature and meaning of doubt as one of these. Faith, though conative, is not simply volition, being rather an incentive to volition than the result of it, and though it implies cognition, this does not mean that the cognition is temporally prior to faith. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."[1] Yet it is logically prior to faith: "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."[2] That is to say, while in one sense Abraham did not know whither he went, in another and more profound sense he knew very well, and it is in regard to this latter cognition that doubt arises as an implicate. The patriarch had to choose between taking the risk and not taking it; but even more fundamental was his inevitable choice between doubting and believing the City of God to be the end of his pilgrimage. If he could be said to have had full and temporally prior knowledge of the nature of his destination, no question of faith would arise, and so no question of doubt or choice or risk. All these, like belief itself, emerge with faith.

[1] *Hebrews*, xi. 9.
[2] *Ibid.*, xi. 11.

That most comprehensive of ejaculatory Catholic confessions, "O my God, I believe in Thee, and all Thy Church doth teach," would be expressed in the terminology I am proposing, "O my God, I have faith in Thee and in Thy Church, such that I believe all thy Church doth teach." This means that I am prepared not simply to accept a certain theological description of God, but rather to believe about God all that my faith may require me to believe; not simply to adhere to a certain body of theological doctrines defined by the Church, but rather to believe all that my faith in the Church may require me to believe; that is, to believe, for example, not only what the Church has taught in the past, but also what she will teach in the future. A child cannot be said to have faith in his mother if he is at once ready to believe all that his mother has said yesterday and ready to disbelieve or even to doubt what his mother will say tomorrow. It need hardly be mentioned that this does not mean that faith requires us to say anything akin to "my country, right or wrong," which, Chesterton remarked, is like saying "my mother drunk or sober."[1]

The history of this jingoistic extravagance may indeed help to clarify the distinction between faith and belief that I am so particularly eager to exhibit. The phrase "our country, right or wrong" was used of America in a speech in 1816,[2] in which it followed an aspiration that America might always be in the right. It was paraphrased thirty years later by a speaker who said, "I hope to find my country in the right: however, I will stand by her, right or wrong."[3] Both of these utterances showed lack of faith in America, that is, in the persons who composed the United States, and consequently the resolution to stand by America

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *The Defendant*.

[2] By Stephen Decatur in a toast at a dinner in his honour. (Mackenzie, *Life of Decatur*, c. 14.)

[3] John J. Crittenden, in a speech in Congress in 1846, when the American President sent a communication about the War with Mexico.

in all circumstances was immoral, since the ground of the speakers' resolution was no more than a doubt whether their country would be right or wrong. But when the phrase was quoted a generation later in a speech in the Senate, there were added the words, "When right, to be kept right; when wrong, to be put right."[1] Here is expressed faith sufficient to evoke moral patriotism; while it does not imply belief in the moral infallibility of Americans, it implies belief that their moral disposition is such that no moral delinquency of theirs is incorrigible. This, of course, may imply (and, if the faith is genuine, does imply), in turn, that doubt about the corrigibility or incorrigibility of Americans' moral behaviour is somehow overcome, and I am assuming that faith of such a kind is all that can be expected for a morally patriotic attitude.

I am not unaware that in religious literature faith and belief have been frequently identified. Both St. Thomas and Luther, when they speak of faith, often mean simply religious belief. But the term "faith" has been used to stress the volitional aspect of the believer's experience, and I think it is useful to distinguish the terms "faith" and "belief" as sharply as I have proposed to do. It is also important to remember that as the idea of faith was well developed before ethical reflection had advanced very far, and was always associated with belief of some kind, it does not simplify terminological usage to try to narrow down faith to give it an exclusively ethical content. The object of faith is an *is* rather than an *ought to be*, though, as we have seen, a moral attitude is involved not only in attaining the *is* but even in attending to it.

Of more direct concern in the present discussion, however, is the fact that because the object of faith is the postulated real, faith, no matter to what extent it be called volitional rather than cognitive, is very intimately connected with

[1] Carl Schurz, in a speech in the Senate in 1872.

intellectual belief, which, according to the arrangement of terms which I have proposed, is plainly implied in faith. What is less obvious, though I think it is no less true, is that faith cannot imply belief without also implying doubt. Since belief itself, when it is not simple credulity but is of a kind that can be intimately associated with faith, cannot indefinitely escape exhibiting the intellectual choice between two alternatives, which choice is always latent in it, and since these alternatives are the alternatives of doubt, doubt is implied in belief and therefore in faith. It ought to be admitted that this may be so theoretically rather than practically; but it is nevertheless more commonly practical than is commonly admitted. Indeed, the implicate of doubt is, as often as not, as conscious as the belief it implies. Beliefs cannot be held in isolation; they must fit into a system of other beliefs, opinions and presuppositions, and the question of rejecting this or that belief, this or that presupposition, arises as soon as we start developing *either* reason or faith. To neglect to attempt adequate provision for such coherence is to put oneself into a position comparable to a certain Modernist one wittily parodied in the apothegm, "I believe there is no God and our Lady is His Mother."

In doubt, judgment is suspended. This is unbelief, plainly distinct from disbelief: to disbelieve a proposition is to believe its logical contrary. Atheism is belief that there is no God, or at any rate that there is no God such as is commonly held by theists to exist. Agnosticism or scepticism about the existence of God is a position of doubt, suspending judgment. If I start with the presupposition that God is, I shall have to contend sooner or later with, say, the problem of evil, and my presupposition cannot well mature into belief without my grappling with some such problem which raises doubt. But if I start with the presupposition that there is no God, I shall have to contend sooner or later

with, say, the problem of the Good, and my atheistic presupposition cannot well mature into belief (that is, disbelief in theism) without my grappling with some problem such as this, raising doubt. This is a fact which exhibits both the theistic hypothesis and the atheistic hypothesis as "live" hypotheses.[1] Life presents ordinarily intelligent men and women with the question. There are many possible questions on which no doubt need arise. No doubt arises in regard to whether two and two make five or twenty-seven, because neither of these postulates has been either presupposed or opined or believed, though it may be doubted whether two and two make four and whether it is meaningful to talk in such terms at all, or tautological. We can dispose of doubt, that is, choose between the alternatives presented by doubt, by the exercise of reason alone, as when we move from a position of doubt about who has committed a murder to a belief grounded in logical certainty that it is the accused. Even in the æsthetic or imaginative realm there is an analogous implicate as often as I have to discern whether an æsthetic object be beautiful or ugly.[2] Confronted by a collection of words, I may be in two minds whether they are poetry or gibberish, and when I apprehend them to be poetry my doubt gives place to belief. If someone asks my advice about his duty in a difficult moral situation, I may very well be in two minds; but by the exercise of the rational reflection and other activities involved in making such decisions, I may be able to affirm my belief about where my friend's duty lies. In all such cases the doubt is a factor in the genuineness of the belief. But

[1] There is no term more ambiguous than "God"; but this is not to say, as logicians of the type of Carnap and Schlick do say, that it is meaningless. One would have expected it to be easier to write off terms which have but one meaning apiece than terms which have dozens or hundreds; but such logicians do not find it so.

[2] See my discussion of the problem of the ugly, in *Aesthetic Experience in Religion* (Macmillan, 1947), c. 3, § 34, pp. 79 ff.

often no "ordinary" activity such as imagination or reflection can by itself help me out of doubt; if I am to escape doubt in such circumstances and arrive at genuine belief, faith is necessary.

Faith is readily associated with the child's attitude because childhood is pre-eminently an age of development and the unfolding of experience. It is possible to live for a considerable time as an adult by working within the circle of experience already unfolded by the exercise of faith, and adult lives spent with the minimum exercise of faith are in fact spent within such a circle, culminating in something near stagnation and atrophy. But a child must either exercise vigorous faith or not develop at all, for he has no capital of experience within which to work. He cannot proceed in any direction without faith, and so faith is seen to be typical of the childlike attitude. But it is equally characteristic of the attitude of adults not content to live by exhausting the possibilities of life within the confines of their present range of experience. No fresh discovery about experience as a whole can in fact be made without the exercise of more than the ordinary capacities for imaginative, reflective and moral activity with which we are endowed. There are duties we cannot discern, truths we cannot know, beauties we cannot behold, except by acts of faith which may enable us to discern, know or behold them. In making the acts of faith, however, we do already in some dim way have the discernment, the knowledge, the æsthesis, which we seek; that is to say, we seek to unfold, or have unfolded to us, the objects we dimly apprehend. Hence one of the most profound prayers of Christians is that which confesses our ignorance in making any petition at all, and asks for "those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask." It is a prayer for that doubt without which faith is wholly impossible.

CHAPTER II

THE SCEPTICAL ELEMENT IN PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

FROM the time of Socrates onwards it has never been in question that a willingness to doubt, to recognize one's own ignorance, is part of the philosophic attitude. This element in the philosopher's work has been much more sharply stressed by some than by others; but no serious European thinker has ever professed to be able to dispense with philosophic doubt. When in 1440 Nicolas of Cusa entitled his treatise *De Docta Ignorantia*, he was appealing to a notion already well established in the minds of educated men, that in order to be worthy of being called learned in the philosophical sense one had first to profess ignorance; only he could be called learned who had first learned to admit he did not know. This old, Socratic notion would however be sheer nonsense if it were a simple affirmation that "to know is not to know and not to know is to know." The meaning of the paradox is and has generally been recognized to be that such knowledge as human beings can even hope to acquire about the ultimate nature of things can be acquired, if it can be acquired at all, only by a willingness to consider the alternatives with which we are confronted in doubt. Genuine philosophy has no short answer to any of its problems; *chercher à connaître, c'est chercher à douter.*

But it has not always been recognized how genuine, how profound, must be this willingness to doubt. In his introduction to *The Fair Maid of Perth*, Scott remarks that there is a vulgar incredulity as well as a vulgar credulity. Disbelief may parade itself in the guise of doubt, but only by a pretence, a form of snobbery by which any upstart,

hearing that it betokens intellectual distinction to doubt, may fancy that he can acquire that distinction simply by affirming that he does not believe. There are other ways, too, in which tribute is indirectly paid to doubt by those who abuse it; for example, the glib fashion in which some religious writers raise only those doubts which they can most easily dispel:

> He could raise scruples dark and nice,
> And after solve 'em in a trice:
> As if Divinity had catch'd
> The itch, on purpose to be scratch'd.[1]

It need hardly be said that doubt is not genuine enough to make a genuine philosopher unless it involves profound anguish of mind. To invent imaginary doubts is like inventing imaginary moral difficulties in order to give some sort of plausibility to one's preconceived intentions. Notoriously, religion often tries to evade that responsibility of doubting which is universally admitted to be the indispensable mark of the philosopher in his search for knowledge. This is most conspicuously true of that kind of religion which tries to separate faith from every other movement of the spirit, as if faith were a mechanical response to a divine revelation and could completely separate itself from every other activity of the human spirit, isolate itself from every aspect of human personality. Yet the most genuine religion never does this, and is not afraid to admit that doubt is an implicate even of faith.

> The man that feareth, Lord, to doubt,
> In that fear doubteth thee.[2]

It has often been observed that superficially religious people are readily shocked by more deeply religious people, and this is in large measure due to the greater willingness of the latter to doubt.

[1] Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*, Part I, canto 1, line 163.
[2] George Macdonald, *Disciple*, Part 32, stanza 15.

As it is impossible then for the profoundly religious person to escape doubting, it becomes a question of how deep shall be the doubts from which his faith is to be forged. Tennyson showed genuine insight when he wrote that

> There lives more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds; [1]

for nothing is more characteristic of the other half than the honesty and anguish of the long history of doubt which lies behind their formulation. All this is spread wide open to the most genuine religious believers, who believe not because they want to believe, but because they have done almost everything of which they are intellectually capable in an effort not to believe, yet cannot help believing. Trying to believe, like trying to be beautiful, is always a somewhat laughable occupation, and no religious thinker need have any fundamental quarrel with Mr. Bertrand Russell when he says: [2] "William James used to preach the 'will to believe.' For my part, I should wish to preach the 'will to doubt'." If the view I have presented of doubt as an implicate of faith be sound, the will to doubt is an implicate of the will to believe, since to have no doubt is to have not even the possibility of genuine faith.

Few would deny in principle what I have been saying about the importance of doubt as an element in philosophic thought, and many would wish to say it even more strongly. What would be much more widely questioned is whether the religious thought of Europe has generally considered religious belief in such a way. It might be pointed out that it is perhaps all very well to talk in this fashion if we are thinking of unusual writers like Pascal, but that the notion of a Christian scepticism is alien from all the main streams of Christian thought and would seem to be peculiarly

[1] Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Part 96, stanza 3.
[2] Bertrand Russell, *Sceptical Essays*, p. 155.

repugnant to the outlook of certain ages. I answer that such is the complexity of religion, not least Christianity, and so abstract is the character of even the best systematic theological analyses, that what is most obviously typical of religion is generally that which is least obvious in a reading of these. Among the features which every one would admit to be most characteristic of the ethos of mediæval Christian worship was the splendour of its ceremonial : the colourful simplicity of the devotions which seemed to the mediæval mind to be of subordinate importance, and the punctilious attention to minutiæ in the devotions which seemed to it to be central to the cultus. Yet one who was completely ignorant of the life and worship of the Middle Ages would find few clues in their theological treatises to suggest the peculiar ethos which we know from other sources to have characterized the life and worship of that time.

This is true in some measure of all religion, and one might go so far as to say that to the extent that it is not true, the worship in question has probably little genuine life. We must not expect that the systematization of religious thought in theology, very necessary though this certainly is, should give us immediate awareness of the life of the Church, of what it "feels like" to be a Christian, a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Jew. Apart from the fact that religion is a very complex experience, its case is not very different from that of other human experience. One is reminded of the centipede who

> Was happy quite
> Until the toad, in fun,
> Said "Pray, which leg goes after which?"
> Which worked his mind to such a pitch
> He lay distracted in the ditch,
> Considering how to run.

Professor Macmurray recounts[1] how in his youth he inter-

[1] John Macmurray, *Interpreting the Universe* (Faber & Faber, 1933), p. 14.

ested himself in skating, and how in particular he once tried to learn a certain figure from a book of instruction. He studied this so carefully that he felt quite sure that when he returned to the ice he could not go wrong; yet he did, till someone came up, took him by the arms, and swung him through the movements; then all his difficulties, he says, "vanished as if by magic," because he had got "the feel of it," had become "aware of it in immediate experience." That which is most obvious and important in any form of experience is just that which not even the most masterly reading of even the best text-book can possibly tell us.

It seems to me that it is only by overlooking this that one can make the mistake of supposing that the dogmas of living Christianity were ever developed apart from doubt, or ever sustained people's faith in the way they have done in complete independence of such doubt. To suppose that religious faith can grow *ex nihilo* must surely be a view so *simpliste* that it is comparable to the view of a small child that money grows in his father's pockets. It is true that one may acquire and fill one's pockets with a fortune one has not earned, and it is certainly Christian teaching that one does not earn one's faith; but still the money does not grow by magic, nor does the faith. It would seem to me wonderful enough were I tomorrow to inherit unexpectedly a million pounds, even if they did not drop in a stream of golden sovereigns from the sky; and it is miracle enough that I should have my religious faith even though it have the same implicates as any other kind.

If we were to take seriously the Fātiha of the Qur'ān when it says, "There is no doubt in this book," we should have to say that there could be no greater indictment of Islam; yet to the extent that Muslim faith is genuine it has doubt within it. On the other hand, it may be that Muhammadanism has had to cope with less doubt than has Christianity; so much the worse for Muslim faith.

Muhammad found no serious difficulty in incorporating Jesus among the holy prophets of Islam only because he evidently knew too little about the New Testament to be troubled with a vital question: is Jesus God or not? Mary, though not generally regarded as one of the prophets of Islam,[1] is described in more than one place in the Qur'ān as ever-virgin,[2] and Professor Sir Thomas Arnold thinks there is reason to suppose that Muhammad taught even the immaculate conception of Mary.[3] All this has been possible only because the doubts behind Catholic acceptance of these doctrines have been ignored. We find much the same sort of phenomenon among people who say that they accept Christian principles as a matter of course and cannot understand why theologians should make such a fuss about them: there is much point in the suggestion that to say "of course I believe" a proposition invariably means, at any rate in the religious context, "of course I do not believe" it, because it pretends to genuine belief without the implicate of doubt, and such belief is bogus.[4]

The New Testament is full of doubt. Doubt makes the mountain which faith is said to move. Every step made in faith reveals the wall of doubt against which faith protests and from which it buoyantly rebounds despite everything. The maxim of King Stanislaus of Poland that to believe with certitude one must begin with doubting, is one which

[1] Nevertheless she is depicted in a Muslim picture of about the early-fourteenth century of the Christian era (in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Suppl. persan 1313, fol. 174) with the flame-halo generally reserved in Muslim art for the prophets of Islam.

[2] E.g., *c.* 66, v. 12.

[3] T. W. Arnold, *The Old and New Testaments in Muslim Religious Art* (Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1928; Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 42.

[4] Not least striking is the case of modern liberalistic Hindus such as Ram Hohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen, and, more recently, Tagore and Radhakrishnan. These squeeze so easily so much Christianity into Hinduism that they do less than justice to both.

had been woven into European thought before the first impact of the teaching of Christ, and from apostolic and patristic times has never ceased to invigorate Christianity. One has but to read the history of the events which preceded Nicæa to appreciate how much doubt went into the formulation of the Nicene Creed. The question which critics of Christianity generally ask or imply in their criticism, "How genuine is this belief?" never yields or could yield a satisfactory answer one way or the other: more relevant and fruitful might be the question, "How genuine is the doubt behind the belief?" The answer to this question, if it could be found (and there is much to guide a search), might not provide us with a definite conclusion about the quality or value of Christian faith; but at least it might furnish strong evidence to bear on the subject. Since we are presented by faith with the proposition, "in spite of *X*, I believe *Y*," that which is most likely to help us to determine in some way what significance we are to assign to *Y* is to know what is the content of *X*. This is what anti-religious polemics seldom care to inquire; yet if the nature of faith is adequately understood it is an obvious question, and one in answer to which religion, I think particularly Christianity, could give a good account of itself. Otherwise it can give but a description of its faith in a manner which can in no way compel assent among those who do not have that faith.

In reading the typical sceptical thinkers, from Pyrrho of Elis to Montaigne and down to our own day, it must occur to us that they raise one problem more immense than any that they try to solve.[1] Since by the sceptical principle of Pyrrhonism (*acatalepsia*) it is impossible to know things in their own nature, Pyrrho concludes that the proper attitude of the philosopher is *ataraxia*, imperturbability. But, however imperturbable we may be we cannot escape the fact that an immediate awareness of reality

[1] Cf. the atheistic "problem of the Good" (*supra*, p. 14 f.).

seems to be presented to our consciousness. It is true that this does not in itself warrant the view that we are not mistaken, and much has been written by philosophers of many schools to show that we are. But if we accept the sceptical principle without qualification, we are left with the problem of why we should even appear to know anything, of how we can profess with such sureness to know that we do not know anything. Universal scepticism, or the nearest approach to it that a philosopher may dare to make in an attempt to be as sceptical as he possibly can be, appears to be the "last word" in doubt; but it may be, and I think is, in fact, nothing of the kind. The effect of all such scepticism has generally been to raise doubts deeper than theirs. This is seen vividly in the case of the corresponding types of religious scepticism. The person who sets out to oppose religion (for the sake of simplicity, let us say Christianity) in a thoroughgoing, radical fashion, with the very legitimate weapon of sceptical criticism, finds, if he squarely faces his task, that he has undertaken something much more difficult than it may have at first appeared to be. For, by reason of the immense springs of doubt which lie in the soil of the Christian garden, he will find himself having to show not only that Christianity is wrong, for instance, in its claim to be optimistic, but also that it is mistaken in its claim to be pessimistic; not only that it has no title to its pretension to be rational, but also that its claim to be irrational is unwarranted; that it is to be disparaged not only for belauding such virtues as the most extreme humility and the most rigorous continence, but also for its benisons on the boldest assurance and on the propagation of children; not only the illicitness of what is from a wordly point of view too strict a code, but also the spuriousness of what is from that same point of view too facile an ethic; not only that Christians should not dogmatize, but also that they should not disbelieve. It turns out

then that such quasi-universal scepticism about religion results in drawing attention to the astonishing complexity of religion, to the vast array of doubts which have made its springboard as springy as it is. Anti-religious scepticism of this kind is so naïve that it is effective only against the most naïve kinds of religion, against religion which is so superficial that it is less misleadingly called superstition. It ends by raising in the minds of intelligent persons in an acute form the most fundamental doubt behind Christian faith: either this religion is the extraordinary thing it claims to be or else it is very much more crassly stupid or monstrously wicked than ever I had supposed a religion could be.

Abler enemies of religion work rather on the principle set forth in the avuncular advice given by Mr. C. S. Lewis's Screwtape to a less experienced devil charged with securing the damnation of a human soul, not to engage in argument about important issues, but rather to divert attention to questions of no great consequence.

> "Don't waste time trying to make him think that materialism is *true* ! Make him think it is strong, or stark, or courageous—that it is the philosophy of the future. That's the sort of thing he cares about. . . . By the very act of arguing, you awake the patient's reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result? Even if a particular train of thought can be twisted so as to end in our favour, you will find that you have been strengthening in your patient the fatal habit of attending to universal issues and withdrawing his attention from the stream of immediate sense experiences. Your business is to fix his attention on the stream. Teach him to call it 'real life' and don't let him ask what he means by 'real'."[1]

This is excellent advice to an apprentice in devilry, to keep off arguments about fundamental issues; not because a devil

[1] C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1942), p. 11 f.

could not easily outwit a human in this, not because he could not convince by argument, but because he would thereby be putting into human hands a weapon most dangerous to infernal interests, namely, the possibility of doubt, which (to pursue Mr. Lewis's picturesque parable) could be used by "the Enemy" (God) in the production of a lively religious faith. So scepticism, as the enemies of religion have learned, is a weapon that must be used sparingly and with care if it is not to turn out to be a boomerang. For anti-religious interests, indifference is a safer weapon, for it is in no way an implicate of genuine faith.

Religious doubt differs from general scepticism in one important respect which ought to be clearly understood. When the plain man is asked by a philosopher who wishes to shake him out of his epistemological complacency (or, perhaps, in lighter mood, just to make sport of his simple-mindedness) what evidence he can show to support his belief that the Sheraton table that he so much admires is "really there," the plain man naturally refers to the empirical evidence, to his senses: "Of course it is there, for I see its elegant shape, its delicate structure, its rich patine; I can also touch it, handle it, even smell the polish." The philosopher has a ready reply to that; but the plain man may quite properly go on: "Very well, then, let me agree that I am talking only about a phenomenon, as you put it; I do not care in the least whether it is like the 'real table' or not; I do not even care whether there is a 'real table' at all, as you suggest there may not be; I am quite content with the 'reality' of the table as I find it." The philosopher might continue to try to worry the plain man into doubt by raising more subtle difficulties; but an obstinately un-philosophic plain man could refuse to budge from his undoubting smugness, because, being *ex hypothesi* un-philosophic, he would not in fact care about anything but his private experience. If asked on what basis he distinguished

between "true" propositions and "false" ones, between "right" actions and "wrong" ones, he might go on to explain as prosily as ever that the philosopher might as well save himself the trouble of trying to disturb his complacency about such questions, about what he meant by his terms, about what meaning meant, and so forth, because he did not care whether he used terms well or ill, whether he was consistent or inconsistent, whether meaning had a meaning; he took experience as he found it and described it in the way he found most convenient. It would be fruitless for the philosopher to point out to him that all this showed that he did hold certain metaphysical, moral and other views implicitly, for he would be quite ready to admit that this might well be the case.

The plain man who on the other hand claims religious experience is in a different case. Suppose that a philosopher tackles him on similar lines. Can it ever be sufficient for him to reply in like manner, "All right, I don't care whether the object of my faith or religious consciousness is in the least like what he appears to me to be, whether indeed he exists at all"? If he did so reply, this plain man would be making it clear to the philosopher that he was not in fact making the specific claim of religion at all, but was claiming only what nobody could dispute, that his consciousness had, like all consciousness, an object. Religion which was content to say no more than this would thereby destroy itself.

It may thus be seen that scepticism can never be irrelevant to religion. Nothing could be more obvious than that there is more in religion than scepticism; but there is also more than scepticism in any philosophy which is more than a philosophical desert. There are two elements in philosophical thought, a sceptical or critical element and a speculative or constructive element, and while the latter by itself is wild, the former by itself is barren. As M. Gilson has wittily said, with this polarity in mind, philosophy

always buries its undertakers;[1] and to the extent that this means simply that all philosophical thought both mortifies itself by scepticism and vivifies itself by constructive reflection, I do not think that the aphorism can be very seriously disputed by any but those who wish to limit philosophy in such a way as to deprive it of its etymological meaning. I think that it is likewise true that religion is necessarily crucified by doubt and resurrected by faith, and that the one notion has no religious significance without the other. While doubt without faith is like Good Friday without Easter, faith without doubt would not even be like the Passover. All this is dramatically presented in Holy Week; in religious thought and life the two elements are inseparable, being as intimately connected as is the flower to the root. Faith without its implicate of doubt is, indeed, a notion as fanciful as the grin of the Cheshire cat in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which only in Lewis Carroll's pleasant fancy could be seen by Alice apart from the cat itself.[2]

[1] Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (Sheed & Ward, 1938), p. 312.

[2] Faith belongs, according to St Thomas, primarily to the speculative and only secondarily to the practical intellect (*Summa Theologica*, 1–2, 9. 56, a. 3). *Fides implicita* or *informis;* a rudimentary faith (in Christ), which he thinks is widespread among men (e.g., *idem*, 2–2, 9, 2, a. 7) is in this respect one with *fides formata*, though this results in filial love instead of servile fear (*idem*, 2–2, 9, 7). All forms of Christian faith, however rudimentary, must contain within themselves the belief/doubt antinomy, and are in this distinguished from all else that is called faith, e.g., *opinio vehemens* (cf. 3 *Sent.*, dist. 23). I do not know enough about Islamic theology to judge whether the contrast between the *Iman fi taghid*, or faith of the unlearned in simple authority, and the *Iman fi ibri*, or faith grounded in intelligence, is intended as a sharper distinction than the Catholic one; but since Islam evidently requires assent to the *teaching* of Muhammad as a minimum affirmation for a man to be deemed a Muslim, it seems plain that here also is some implicate of doubt.

CHAPTER III

CONVENTION AND PROTEST IN RELIGION AND IN IRRELIGION

CONVENTION is notoriously associated with religion. But no less characteristic of genuine religion is protest, and though only part of a now maimed and divided Christendom glories in the designation "Protestant," there can be no true Christianity from which protestantism is alien. By this I mean that wherever there is true Christian faith there is protestantism, just as there is orthodoxy. If Protestantism means by its designation to claim a monopoly of protestantism, it claims no less than does, say, the Græco-Russian Orthodox Church if this claims a monopoly of orthodoxy: to say that a Church is not protestant is at least as grave a charge as to say that it is not orthodox. Being protestant, in this sense, is no guarantee that the faith of the Church or individual so designated is genuine, yet if it is not protestant it is certain to be bogus. St Ignatius Loyola was protestant to the core; and to admit this does not in itself enable me to say that his Christian faith was genuine, but only that it may have been genuine, while if I conceded that Loyola was no protestant I should have to go on to acknowledge that his faith was wholly spurious. So much for an important definition.

Protest is in fact simply a moral development of doubt. The question whether a situation ought to evoke protest is therefore bound up with the question whether it ought to evoke doubt. As every situation leaves room for doubt, so it leaves room for protest; but a fundamental problem, which we shall have to consider later, is the basis on which religious doubts and protests are to be selected. Since, as

we have seen, universal scepticism entails intellectual suicide, we need not be much surprised to find that unrestricted protest involves total demoralization. What then are we to doubt? Against what are we to protest? Irreligion appears both to protest and to doubt no less than does religion. Are we to say then that religion is nothing but irreligion with faith added? This absurdity might well have to be admitted if religion doubted and protested indiscriminately; but plainly there is an economy of doubt and of protest, the nature of which we must try later to discover.

In the meantime, let us turn to conventionality. Unless

> Religion were intended
> For nothing else but to be mended,[1]

there must be convention in it. For though conventionality be, as Bergson put it, a derivative perversion of a once living reality, it is as impossible for a Christian as it is for any other human society[2] to be either wholly a social or exclusively an individual affair. As Bergson also observes, "Individual and society imply each other reciprocally.[3] Kierkegaard, than whom no one has more strongly championed the individualist protest against Erastianism, had no love of "private judgment," or of that type of religion which professes to belittle every conception of authority external to the individual. It was because it was so repugnant to him that the mob should constitute the Church that he wanted to disintegrate the mob, so that by disintegration its components might *become fully individual and so be capable of re-integration as a Church.* Genuine individualism must strengthen Christian society, as genuine community fortifies

[1] Samuel Butler, *Hudibras,* Part 3, canto 2, line 8.

[2] Christian society is human though it profess to be also other than human.

[3] Henri Bergson, *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (Paris, Alcan, 1932), p. 211 f.

the individual Christian. Liturgically, this antinomy is discoverable in the fact to which A. G. Hebert refers in noting that when spontaneity in worship is sought by extempore prayer in a large congregation, "the result in general is that the assembly is reduced to passivity, as it waits with some restlessness for what its leader will say on its behalf."[1] It does not follow that even the most eccentric individualism, if only it be genuine, detracts in the least from the corporate splendour of worship. Only people unaccustomed to individual activity in worship and obsessed by fear of the antinomy to which I allude ever feel disturbed in, say, a Roman or Eastern Orthodox service by the private eccentricities of those around them. In all manifestations of religion there must be a circle of convention and protest; however "thin" the circle may become here or there it can never be broken without destroying the life of both protest and convention, for the one cannot subsist without the other. Genuine protest gives life to convention, as genuine convention vivifies protest. It is when an attempt is made to separate them that convention becomes a lifeless protest and protest develops into a dull conventionality.

This may be illustrated by a hypothetical example. Suppose that a small company of people in a very materialistic community, having doubted and protested against the generally accepted presuppositions of that community, embrace, by faith, a religious view and way of life, consequently incurring the obligation, which should seem to them to be also a joy and privilege, of witnessing to the view and way of life they have embraced, in such a way as to evangelize (that is, herald "the good news" to) the world around them. How can it be done without convention? The convention is already implicit, ideally,

[1] A. G. Hebert, *The Form of the Church* (Faber & Faber, 1944), p. 82.

in their common protest against the materialism of the world. They cannot go on simply protesting, without incurring the very proper reproach of having no constructive alternative to offer to the worldy view and way of life. This they can provide only by determining and accepting a practical convention, *faute de mieux*. Though unwilling to offer this as a perfect pattern, they exhibit it as a humble essay, subject to incessant revision by the aid of a continuous supply of doubt and protest and of a lively faith from within.

There is a danger, of course, that this convention become a fetish, unillumined by doubt, uninvigorated by faith; but this is only an aspect of the danger of idolatry to which all religion is subject, as is all human activity. But such conventionality is in no way peculiar to religion; on the contrary, it is typical of all human society. Naturally, a society, while it deplores the stupidity of other societies' conventionalities, is in great measure blind to its own. The most convention-bound society is that which is most untroubled by doubt, and if the view which I am presenting of doubt as an implicate of faith be true, a society which has an experience of genuine faith is, though not immune from conventionality, least likely to be fettered by it. The most deeply religious people, however untrained in philosophy, are always more quick to laugh at conventionalities detected in their religion than are worldly people inclined to laugh at the conventionalities of their own society. "Men like conventions because men made them" is a general principle which a worldly society tends to recognize only as a Shavian witticism wrapped up in a clever play, while profoundly religious people have always been too painfully conscious of it to utter it so ingenuously. Not only is it part of their general protest against the world's shallowness, but it is part of their ceaseless protest against themselves. Shaw also reminds us that "the early Christians were called men who

wished to turn the world upside down"[1] but he does not remind us of the even more important historical fact that they wished to turn themselves upside down; upside down not only in relation to the world, but in relation to their own idolatries; or, indeed, facing any way up so long as it faces up to God.

I should therefore offer three reasons for the fact that religion is commonly associated with conventionality of the worst kind. In the first place, there is what is called in the jargon of modern psychology a widespread "unconscious awareness" that conventionality should be incompatible with living religion, and therefore considerable surprise when it is discovered that even living religion has some conventions. This is accentuated by the fact that religious people, unlike worldly people, make little or no attempt to hide or disguise even their most absurd conventions, frankly accepting them as part of the frailty of mankind or else vehemently protesting against them "from the housetops." Secondly, a worldly society is extremely disinclined to consider how much more conventional are its own conventions than any to which living religion ever succumbs. Thirdly, since faith withers through lack of doubt, and so religion through lack of protest, a withered religion (that is, one which has lost its faith) always becomes conspicuously conventional, because there is practically nothing else left for it to become. Such religious conventionality may be very dull, very stodgy; it appears uglier than worldly conventionality, much as a haggard old woman who has once been a pretty girl may look even uglier to those who remember her beauty than does a woman who has never been anything else but plain. Though no more dully conventional than any other kind of conventionality it cuts a more pathetic figure.

It must be noticed, however, that a society unfamiliar with

[1] G. B. Shaw, *Prefaces* (Constable, 1934), *Three Plays by Brieux:* p. 210.

the life of another often sees in this far more conventionality than there is, very much as even the faces of the Chinese look alike to the majority of western Europeans. Only a very simple-minded novice, only a very raw recruit, needs Thomas Usk's reminder that "habit maketh no monk, ne wearing of gilt spurs maketh no knight;"[1] to tried monks and old soldiers nothing could be more obvious; as much a platitude as it would be to an old married couple to be told that there is more in marriage than romantic love. The superficial outside observer of a religious community is not likely to detect how much lively protest is at play within apparently conventional observances. He is often shocked, for example, especially if he have religious pretensions of his own, at the flippant humour which he may find behind the scenes in reference to the most solemn ordinances of religion, and he not seldom mistakes for impiety that robustness of protest which is the very sustenance, as the moral development of an implicate of faith, of the most profound reverence and delicate devotion. More must be said in a later chapter on the connection between religious humour and doubt-sifted faith. Our business for the moment is rather to show that though religion may wither into conventionality of a singularly dreary kind, even living religion is to be expected to look very much drearier than it is to those who half-heartedly glance at it from a distance. Religious experiences, however vivacious, are likely to look bald and tedious outside the existential moment, and those who are least accustomed to such moments are least likely to credit religious observances with being less conventional than they appear to be from a conventionally distant seat.

The conventionality of irreligion is very much more stubbornly uncritical of itself than any truly religious conventionality can be even at its worst. Neither patrician nor

[1] *Testament of Love*, vii. 91, formerly ascribed to Chaucer. But cf. Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose*, l. 6192.

plebian, neither aristocratic nor democratic nor totalitarian societies, have ever been free of smug conventionality. Apart from religion, only philosophers have seriously attacked social complacency in this matter, and apart from religion they have done so with but slow and scant success. Pyrrho's complaint that convention governs human action is hardly less true of modern society except to the extent that living religious protest is brought to bear upon such society. The freedom of art and thought may suffer through the interferences of pseudo-religious conventionality; but they are certainly never less assured than under a régime or thorough-going irreligion.

But when all that is said, it must be recognized that though the conventions of irreligion be more obtuse than any other, irreligion is capable of genuine protest. The moral indignation behind irreligious revolution cannot always or even often be lightly dismissed as shallow or insignificant. Irreligious people are no more disqualified from being genuinely protestant than they are from being genuinely artistic or genuinely scientific. But their protests are no springboard for faith because they are grounded in doubts which, however genuine and vigorous, are restricted in such a way that they do not allow all experience to be brought to bear upon them. While it may be questioned whether all one's morality be not vitiated by such restriction within a limited field (and on this the Christian doctrine of sin must insist), it cannot be denied that one may deliberately shut off one's mind from certain data and yet be not wholly incapacitated from making moral distinctions within the restricted field. A man may shut himself off from a great deal of beauty, as did the Puritans, without totally unfitting himself for all æsthetic discrimination: the artistic sensibility of the Puritans was evidently blunted by their fanatical extravagances; but though these may have reduced their æsthetic experience to little more than the lugubrious

singing of psalms, they could not have been incapable of artistic discrimination, for even the most lugubrious psalm-tune may be sung well or badly.[1] If a theatre company choose to act a tame play we may well remark that it was very silly of them to make such a choice; but if they act this bad play well we felicitate them on making the most of it, even though we ask, "What might not they have done with a better script?" Their good performance does not exonerate them from having made a foolish choice; but their self-inflicted injury does not entirely paralyse them. Though Harvey's knowledge was very limited in comparison with that of modern scientists, his seventeenth-century treatises on the motion of the heart and the circulation of the blood are still read with pleasure and admiration by scientists today.

It is true that the case of morality is different from the last, because an agent who is immoral enough to limit wittingly the area within which he will be moral thereby affects for the worse every action he does much more radically than does an ignorant person adversely affect by his ignorance the thoughts that he may think. If a person, being aware of a duty to respect the lives and property of all men, nevertheless determines to respect only those of his own class or race or society, even the noblest manifestations of virtue of which he thereupon remains capable lack the quality that such actions have in a person who has not so confined the range of his moral endeavour; nevertheless, he is not so immoral as a man who indiscriminately robs or kills anyone whose property or life he thinks may serve his selfish interests.

Morality so conceived has, I submit, a limited autonomy and a cogency of its own, but only somewhat as a formal logic has these. Such a morality, and such a logic, may

[1] M. Léon Wencélius and others have shown that Calvinism is not necessarily antipathetic to art. See *Proceedings of the Fourth Calvinistic Congress* (Edinburgh, 1938), pp. 150 ff.

become so formal, so "pure," as to be inadequate even for the purposes for which they were intended. The fundamental religious objection to all forms of human activity, and especially moral activity, which seek to maintain themselves in isolation from the full stream of life and make themselves absolute within even their own domain, is that no single mode of human experience has or can have any such absolute dominion. Religion should not belittle any modes of or abstractions from experience; these are indispensable to it. It is not against modes or abstractions as such that religion must protest, but against modes of experience purporting to be experience itself, against abstractions posing as the living stream from which they are abstracted. Art, science and morality may each say to the other "I do not care what claims you make so long as you do not interfere with my domain"; but religion does care very much, for it is bound both to recognize the limited autonomy of all these activities and to assert its own claim to integrate all experience and direct it to God, whose love, while it can brook no rival, can regard no love, however warped, alloyed and misguided, as wholly alien from itself. In religion, all may be forgiven except that which, even if it be virtue itself, sets itself up in independence of God. All vices may be forgiven, but not virtues[1] which, being, so to speak, two-dimensional, have no religious depth, no sense of reverence before the mystery of the indivisibility of experience, and acknowledge no need of such depth, no need of awe before such a mystery.

The blasphemy of irreligion consists not in having "other gods," but in having "other gods before Me,"[2] and to put a virtue in absolute independence of God is certainly no less blasphemous in the eyes of religion than so to put a

[1] Cf. G. K. Chesterton, *Ballade d'une Grande Dame* in *Poems* (London, Burns & Oates, 1917), p. 147 f.

[2] *Exodus* xx. 3.

scientific theory or a lump of exquisitely sculptured wood. The religious protest is against all such partition of experience that involves the idolatry of any of the cloven parts. Only to protest is all that religion asks to avoid this blasphemy.

Religion must always take this protestant attitude because experience must be brought to God in the entirety which it is the business of religion to achieve; such consecrated experience may be poor and feeble—it can be strengthened and enriched—but it must be entire:

> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all.[1]

It may thus be seen that, in respect both of their conventions and of their protests, the difference between religion and irreligion is radical. While neither the conventions nor the protests of irreligion enable it to offer even a plausible pretence of integrating experience and the human soul, true religion is conventional and protestant only because it must "convene" in order to integrate and must protest in order to avoid the disintegration which is the inevitable alternative. Morality is in a peculiar case: as the highest, final abstraction of all human experience, it is nearest to religion, yet furthest away, since by its very nearness it is most in danger, as was Lucifer, of setting itself up in absolute independence of all that lies outside itself. This is why moral pride, for example, is more intolerable to true religion than any other kind, say, artistic or even intellectual pride. Because living religion has in view the boundless love of God and conceives all human experience of value, such as beauty and goodness, as dependent on this love, it must oppose every form of despotism on the part of any determinations of such value; because the source

[1] Isaac Watts, *When I survey the wondrous Cross*; in *The English Hymnal*, 107.

CHAPTER IV

THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST

CHRISTIAN theologians have not always adequately appreciated the peculiar importance of the evangelical notion of an unforgivable sin, the sin or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. All the synoptic Gospels explicitly refer to it,[1] and there are also allusions to it in the Epistles.[2] St Luke presents it in a somewhat different setting from the others, and in his account it may be apart from its original context: exegetes are not agreed on this. But in the Marcan account, to which St Matthew offers a close parallel, the significance of the notion is made clear. Jesus, having cured a demoniac, is taunted by the Scribes and Pharisees with having the power so to "cast out devils" because he is himself a devil. It is in his reply to this charge that Jesus says: "All their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and their blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."[3] To this St Mark adds, "because they said, He hath an unclean spirit."[4]

It is fundamental to the teaching of Jesus, on the other hand, that if only a man sincerely repent of his sins, they shall be forgiven for the asking, no matter how great they be. It is plain therefore that the unpardonable sin is unpardonable only because by its nature it is one of which

[1] *Matt.* xii. 31–32; *Mark* iii. 28–30; *Luke* xii. 10.

[2] *Hebrews* vi. 4–8; x. 26–31; 1 *John* v. 16.

[3] *Mark* iii. 28–29 (Revised version). The last phrase (ἀλλ' ἔνοχός ἐστιν αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος) is inaccurately rendered in the Authorized Version. ἔνοχος (= ἐνεχόμενος, from ἐν ἔχω) means "held in the grip of."

[4] *Mark* iii. 30.

one cannot repent. There is no question of anyone having to fear that any sin for which he sincerely asks forgiveness will go unforgiven by God.[1] Dread such as John Bunyan depicts in *Grace Abounding* of having committed the unforgivable sin is itself a testimony to his not having committed it. Kierkegaard's "sickness unto death" (despair, meaning an existential anguish) is the antithesis of the "sin unto death," which implies the absence of even the beginnings of such anguish. Not even lack of faith, that all-important precondition of Christian salvation, is ever in itself unforgivable. The faith of the twelve disciples was often very shaky.[2] Not only did Thomas doubt; even Peter, commanded to walk on the water, began to founder, and incurred the gentle rebuke: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"[3] No weakness, even of faith, is incurable. "If ye were blind," said Jesus to the Pharisees, "ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."[4]

What is incurable and therefore unforgivable is a firm and persistent determination not to doubt one's presuppositions, not to allow one's own prejudices to be put in question. The rich man in hell begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his family house, to warn his brothers "lest they also come into this place of torment;" but Abraham replies: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."[5] A man who has completely closed his mind against a hypothesis will find some means or other of explaining away even a situation in which it is shown to be true. No miracle can ever affect the mind of anyone who has fully resolved to repudiate even the possibility of the miraculous.

[1] Though ἁμάρτημα generally means an act rather than a state, an act may express a state, and it is only to the extent that an act expresses an unforgivable state that it can be itself unforgivable.

[2] Even Jesus, on the Cross, seems to doubt.

[3] *Matt.* xiv. 31. [4] *John* ix. 41. [5] *Luke* xvi. 31.

This point is the theme of Bruce Marshall's earliest nov one of his most amusing and profound.[1] Father Malachy humble and pious Benedictine monk, goes to Edinburgh spend a few months with the clergy of the Roman Cath Cathedral there. In a chance meeting in the street with incumbent of the Anglican church opposite, he is shocl at the Modernist opinions of the latter, and in the heat c little argument about miracles, Father Malachy, accept a challenge to prove his case, rashly offers to translate will, by the power of God, a nearby dance-hall of ill-rep to any part of the world the rector may care to menti at half past eleven the following night. The rector sel the Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth as a destination for miraculous flight which the Benedictine has undertaken accomplish. The priests at the clergy-house are horrifiec learn what he has undertaken, and he is not a little une himself; they dread the ridicule which failure would br on the Roman Church, represented in Edinburgh b small minority. Assembled an hour or so before the p posed feat is due, Father Malachy, partly to rouse his o confidence, reminds them that "matter is all electrons as the Host . . . is all God" and so forth, and asks them light six candles on the high altar and lay out white v ments in anticipation of a solemn *Te Deum* for the miracle his return.

At the appointed time, half past eleven at night, disreputable building is visibly levitated, leaving a la vacant square of ground, and is carried off through the aglow with its multi-coloured lights, towards the Bass R on which it noiselessly alights at thirteen minutes to twe Full of new wonder at the power of God, Father Mala naturally supposes that he has been chosen as an instrum for a widespread conversion of worldly materialists to Catholic Faith; but although the event receives enorm

[1] *Father Malachy's Miracle* (London, Heinemann, 1931).

publicity throughout the civilized world, there are only very few conversions, and on the whole the world remains unmoved. Even within the Roman Church, though there is immense interest in the event, the official attitude is one of extreme caution: the faithful are to be free to believe or disbelieve in the miracle. But as for the world at large, the local policeman on duty who calls at the clergy-house the following morning to ask routine questions is not quite sure whether or not he should arrest Father Malachy, and he is deterred chiefly by the consideration that to do so might prejudice his chances of promotion, since there is no law on the statute-book forbidding the performance of miracles; the owner of the dance-hall and another financially interested party call to present a claim for £10,113 19*s.*, principally on the ground that such an establishment is likely to be less profitable on a small rocky island near the mouth of the Firth of Forth than in the middle of a city; an American showman, interested in the commercial possibilities of employing a theurgist, calls to present a financial proposition; a Modernist church dignitary in London broadcasts talks on the impossibility of miracles; and while the press takes the view that a cruel hoax has been perpetrated and that "British sanity" shall "win the day" against Mumbo Jumbo and black magic, the owner of the establishment, representing himself as a wronged man, succeeds in getting for it the support of rich sympathizers, making it on its new site more grandly dissolute and financially profitable than ever before. At length Rome, though still allowing belief in the miracle, sends a cardinal to tell the bishop of the diocese that it will be in the best interest of the Church, in view of the blasphemies the miracle has evoked, that no more *Te Deums* or other devotions relating to it be encouraged. Finally, distressed by all that has happened, Father Malachy implores God to forgive his pride in supposing himself to have been chosen as an instrument for world-wide conversion, and

to restore the building to its original place. This is duly done. During the return flight of the building the patrons hear the Modernist dignitary's peroration: "if an œcumenical council were to decide to-morrow that the dance-hall in question had flown through the air, I should not have the slightest difficulty in believing that it had done nothing of the sort." When news of the fresh development is spread, it is held that it but further establishes the soundness of the view that Christianity is Mithraic in origin. And even the popular chorus-song about the miracle is very soon forgotten.

Mr. Marshall aptly calls his novel "a heavenly story with an earthly meaning"; no less has it a heavenly one. Bigoted complacency will not be changed "though one rose from the dead" to change it. It is not that it cannot believe, not even that it will not believe, but rather that it will not even doubt. Not lack of belief makes it inflexible, but rather lack of doubt. It is well known that in certain forms of mental derangement this obstinate refusal to doubt one's own presuppositions is very marked: the patient, having determined his presuppositions will go to endless pains to make everything else cohere with them. But only where they are in danger does he close his mind; on matters irrelevant to them his mind may be very open. It was once my duty to visit an inmate of a lunatic asylum, a Miss X, whom I had never seen. The attendant, warning me that the patient to whom I was about to be introduced did not believe she was Miss X, brought me into the presence of a middle-aged woman engaged in occupational therapy. This woman talked pleasantly as we went downstairs, and after some conversation she asked me whether I had not been misdirected and whether I wished in fact to see another patient, a Miss X. In view of the attendant's warning I immediately assured her with a bland smile that it was she whom I had come to visit. But after some further con-

versation she had already shaken my convictions sufficiently to make me ask the attendant whether there might not in fact have been a mistake, and after inquiry the attendant acknowledged that there were two patients of the same name and that I had been taken to the wrong one. When I then apologized to the patient whom I had taken away from work, she replied with a smile no less bland than mine had been: "Not at all, we all make mistakes at times." I left her looking at me as though she knew that I was an even greater fool than at that moment I felt. I afterwards discovered, however, that her own particular mistake was a persistent conviction that she was heiress to the united throne of Great Britain and France, incarcerated by joint order of the President of the French Republic and King George the Sixth.

Persistent refusal to open one's mind to doubt certain presuppositions does not preclude one from being quite open-minded about others. Indeed, a person who has a particularly prejudiced, closed mind on certain matters of far-reaching importance is likely for psychological reasons to make a show of open-mindedness about other and less important questions. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is an expression of the state of mind of a person who is obstinately resolved not even to doubt his presuppositions against religious truth which might otherwise be evident to him. The Pharisees had their own presuppositions about the character of the expected Messiah; Jesus did not fit into their picture, and in their state of mind nothing that he could conceivably have said or done could ever have persuaded them that he was the Christ. Where the mind is not so settled there is always the possibility that among the doubts faith will take root and bring forth its fruit; the settled mind leaves no room for doubt and therefore no room for faith.

Since the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost relates to

failure to doubt one's *religious* presuppositions, it is evident that it is "within" or "near" religion that we are in gravest danger of falling into it.

> To kerke the narre, from God more farre,
> Has bene an old-sayed sawe.[1]

This paradoxical saying need be prompted by no fanatical, individualistic grudge against the Church. It represents but another facet of the truth underlying the old maxim attributed to Cardinal Paleotti and some others, that "there can be no church in which the demon will not have his chapel." The greater the good the more eagerly will selfish interests counterfeit it, and it is to be expected that pseudo-religious bigotry, the height of irreligion, should be a danger ever present to genuine religion. But it can appear to resemble genuine religion only to the extent that the onlooker lacks experience of this, confounding religious faith with the simple absence of doubt. On the other hand, it is often extremely difficult—I should prefer to say practically impossible, speaking humanly—to distinguish bigotry which is incurably irreligious, the sin against the Holy Ghost, from a very different attitude, namely, the phase of the faith-process which is a healthy prelude to an act of genuine faith. This attitude, the birth-pangs of faith, so to speak, is often conspicuous where the faith about to emerge is very great. It is not surprising to find that when a man is contemplating a long leap into the darkness he clings more desperately, with seeming obstinacy, to his moorings, than he does when he is contemplating only a smaller leap. St Paul is a classic example: we find that, as he set forth on the road to Damascus, he was "yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter"[2] against those who professed that faith to

[1] Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender*: *Julye* 1. Cf. John Heywood, *Proverbs*, Part 1, Chapter 9: "The nearer the church, the farther from God"; a saying quoted by Bishop Andrewes in a sermon preached in 1622 before King James I.

[2] *Acts* ix. 1; cf. *infra*, p. 64.

which on that very road he was presently to be converted. His was no closed mind, but rather one which was opening so fast that his not unnatural reaction was to try with singular vigour to shrink from the process. Incurable irreligion, whether in the guise of anti-religion or religiosity, knows nothing of such anguish.

It need hardly be said that this Christian notion of sin beyond pardon cannot be understood apart from the Christian doctrine of grace. In the Christian view no one can sin unforgivably except to the extent that he is given grace which he refuses to accept. That a man should be said to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit implies that he has some recognition, however vague, of this divine agency. Such a man resists grace only by some kind of self-deception. In Mr. Marshall's story, for example, the characters who are depicted as blind to the wonderful event which has taken place in their midst are generally self-blinded. They adduce specious arguments, sometimes, in support of their point of view, and these are comical enough from the vantage point of a reader who can see through Father Malachy's eyes; but to the characters themselves the arguments become convincing through the gross self-deception, a kind of mental sleight of hand, which the characters perpetrate on themselves. There is no genuine doubt in their minds; on the contrary, they know very well what has happened and try by every means in their power to dim out its significance. It is as though a person were to say: "Not only do I believe it to be wicked to be unkind to people and know also that Mr. X has given me abundant reason to be very kind to him, but apart even from such considerations I have an overwhelming desire to pour out kindness upon him; nevertheless I will resist this desire obstinately and be pitilessly cruel, since that is what I have resolved to be."

It is because the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit signifies an attitude of such profound obstinacy that I

specially connect it with the doubting element in faith. Such unforgivable blasphemy must mean, in its Christian setting, that resistance has taken place at a radical level. It cannot ever be unpardonable to shudder, hesitate or even with some obstinacy resist a call to make a leap in faith,[1] when one is confronted with a situation which seems to demand this leap; but to pretend to oneself that the situation has not arisen at all, or to turn one's back on it even when one is provided with a fleeting glance of what lies at the other side, a divine love inviting one to come, even stretching out arms to bear one up on the way—these are unpardonable reactions, because they represent resistance which cannot be overcome except by a deprivation of one's freewill that would at the same time deprive one of the possibility of responding to the situation at all. So fundamental to faith is its implicate of doubt that all resistance to demands to believe is remediable unless it goes so deep as to be a refusal even to begin to doubt. This involves a self-deception so thorough, resulting in a disintegration of the personality so radical, that nothing can ever again give the personality life and health. Spiritual suicide is fully accomplished only when we refuse even to begin to doubt our presuppositions. It is this refusal to doubt that makes it possible for us to commit the ultimate blasphemy of irreligion, demanding that God conform to our measure, making him in our image.

[1] Cf. Erich Frank, *Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth* (Oxford University Press, 1945, p. 43): "At the bottom of faith, there is doubt. . . . Thus it may be permissible to make the paradoxical statement that the real proof of God is the agonized attempt to deny God."

CHAPTER V

RELIGIOUS AGNOSTICISM AND CHRISTIAN HUMILITY

Pride is, according to the universal teaching of the Christian Church, of all sins the most fundamental. It was against the pride of the Roman hierachy that the Reformers levelled their most bitter attacks, and it was against the pride of the Reformers that Rome thundered loudest in reply. It was pride, ran the old legend, that caused Lucifer to fall from heaven, and Adam's sin consisted in the pride which made him aspire to be equal with God to the extent of securing his own autonomy of will. Aquinas distinguished three kinds of pride: the first of these is the beginning or root of all sin, the second is sin in general, and the third is the first of the seven capital or "deadly" sins.[1] Even in this last meaning it is the foundation of the other six deadly sins: in Dante's Purgatory it had to be expiated before any of the other six could be cleansed.[2] Not only is the persistent tendency in popular religion to identify sin with sex a gross misrepresentation of orthodox Christian teaching, but every attempt to diminish the guilt of pride by excessive stress on any other sin must lead to a caricature of Christianity. Pride is the deadliest of all chinks in a Christian's armour.

Corresponding to the vice of pride is the virtue of humility. Though the ancient pagan world tended to think of pride as being either virtuous or otherwise, the notion of humility was not wholly unknown even to it.

[1] *Summa Theologica*, 1–2, q. 84, a. 2. Cf. *Ecclesiasticus* x. 13 (A. V.); x. 15 (Vulg.): "Pride is the beginning of sin."

[2] *Purgatorio*, Cantos 10–12.

"The higher we are," wrote Cicero, "the more humble we ought to be."[1] But humility, because it is so easily feigned and can be, as La Rochefoucauld observed,[2] an artifice of pride, requires for its genuine attainment a fine delicacy of spiritual perception, and it can be trusted only to the extent that it is associated with love. It is such circumstances that Christianity claims to provide, and Christian humility has a peculiar fragrance of its own, as have likewise, for example, Christian courage and Christian hope. "Humble thyself in all things," counsels Thomas à Kempis,[3] and Christian writers from the first evangelists to Tennyson and Spurgeon exalt this virtue above others. Tennyson calls it "the highest virtue, mother of them all,"[4] and this is a typically Christian outlook. Humility characterizes the spirit of all the historic monastic orders: a monk should be anything else rather than proud.[5] The novitiate is designed to inculcate the spirit of humility without which the vows of neither poverty, chastity, nor obedience, could seriously be contemplated. The penances which have survived in even the less rigorous orders have all this virtue in view. Typical of them are: kneeling with outstretched arms in the refectory, sitting on the floor to eat, and lying prostrate before the altar. Commonly, on Maundy Thursday, the Abbot or other Superior kneels before each of the assembled monks, beginning with the youngest and least exalted, to wash the feet of each as a sign that he who is set in the place of highest authority should be humbler than any of the rest.

It is true, broadly speaking, that humility is, as John Selden called it, "a virtue all men preach, none practise, and yet everybody is content to hear. The master thinks

[1] *De Officiis*, c. 26, § 90.
[2] *Maximes*, 254.
[3] *De Imitatione Christi*, Book 3, c. 24.
[4] *The Holy Grail*, line 445.
[5] St. Benedict's Rule (c. 7) distinguished twelve steps in the practice of this virtue.

it good doctrine for his servants, the laity for the clergy, and the clergy for the laity."[1] In the case of other traditional virtues it has usually been obvious enough that they apply universally, to cause objections here and there that perhaps this one or that has been too much stressed. The mediæval notion that it is a virtue to sleep in one's day-clothes or to wear a hair-shirt or to roll one's body in ice or a bed of nettles, would find little acceptance to-day, even in the most open-minded Christian circles. Everyone sees, however, that it is a virtue to be humble, because we all recognize the virtue at least in other people and find it good in them, and it then needs but little reflection to see that it is good in all. Its centrality has never been seriously disputed by Protestant or Catholic, Quaker or Orthodox, learned or ignorant, sinner or saint.

Genuine humility is, I have suggested, intimately associated with love, the spring of all Christian virtues. The love of man for God implies humility, since we are, according to Christian teaching, completely dependent on God's love for us. We can no more determine to fall in love with God than we can determine to fall in love with anyone else. We are required to wait for God and to recognize that "We love him because he first loved us."[2] Even in ordinary experience we know that there is no true love without humility on both sides. Christ humbled himself,[3] in revealing God's love for us. Humility goes hand in hand with love, as pride and hatred go together. It stands in a relation to love analogous to that in which doubt stands to faith. I would suggest therefore that faith and love, both central to the Christian conception of religion and life, have as their implicates doubt and humility respectively, so that the relation between doubt and humility is likely to be as close as the relation between faith and love.

[1] *Table-Talk: Humility.* [2] 1 *John* iv. 19.
[3] *Philippians*, ii. 8.

It is evident that humility is a moral aspect of doubt, for if our doubt be genuine we can find no cause for pride, and there is a sense in which humility is a moral disposition which generates doubt. Truly humble people must be singularly reluctant to affirm anything without qualification, except to the extent that they are inflamed by a love which compels them to speak. The narrow-minded bigotry which we have seen to be, in its most extreme form, incapable of being forgiven, is due to pride: wherever there is even a vestige of humility there is hope of spiritual light. Dogmatic assertions which purport wholly to exclude the possibility of error or inadequacy are incompatible with genuine faith. It is true that love may impel a Christian to make extravagant affirmations; but these are not affirmations which ever seek to be exclusive of all others. The schoolmen, in spite of their predilection for classification and definition, found it easier to explain what God is not, than to explain what he is, and this *via negativa* is a road along which all honest and profitable religious inquiry must travel. There is no other way: we must learn to stoop in order to know the things of God. Open-mindedness, the fundamental religious disposition, is almost a synonym for doubt and intellectual humility. Our mind is open when we bend it low, and this is not something that has to be done once for all, but rather a habit of mind that must be acquired. It is useless to try to break pride; broken, it is as rigid as before. It must be bent, and this is usually much more painful. In one respect at any rate modern civilization may accustom us to the religious attitude, since life in great cities demands suppleness in all who would survive, and in religion it is more important to be supple than to be staunch. To the extent that the modern scientific attitude implies humility, true religion must eagerly welcome it. It compares very favourably with ecclesiasticism, much of which is notoriously arrogant.

The fear of latitudinarianism and of the view that one kind of religion is as good as another results in much religious bigotry, estranging many from the liberal modes of thought in which they have been trained. But genuine liberalism in religion is as far from such latitudinarianism as it is from fanaticism. The remedy against the danger of indiscriminate gluttony, eating the first dish that catches one's eye, is not to confine ourselves to a monotonous, restricted diet, but rather to be eager to taste new dishes, discriminate among them, and determine their place in our diet. The famous French chef Ude, who cooked for Louis XIV, is said to have had such a contempt for haphazard eating that he left the service of Lord Sefton because one of the guests added pepper to the soup he had prepared as a work of art; but not even Ude could pretend that his dishes were perfect. In religion likewise we ought to be eager to profit from the experience of others who may be wiser than we; yet it would be arrogance for anyone to claim that his knowledge of God was indisputably superior to his neighbour's. To do so is to close our mind, and by so closing our mind we exclude not others but ourselves from knowledge of and communion with God. The latitudinarian and the religious fanatic are more intimately allied than may be supposed, since they are both fraudulent imitations, the one of doubt and humility, the other of faith and love. Latitudinarianism is a mock-liberalism, much as pride may take the form of mock-humility; it is none the less fanatical at heart.

Religious agnosticism, it has often been noticed, lies only a hair's breadth from the liveliest religious faith. That which most profoundly shocks the genuine religious agnostic is the seemingly arrogant cocksureness with which some Christians appear to claim to lay hold of God. It is above all the apparently slick, glib dogmatism of religion which disgusts such agnostics. The heresy of the Gnostics of the early Church consisted in their lack of doubt, in their lack

of humility: they were not agnostic enough to be truly religious. Here is what T. H. Huxley wrote:[1]

> "I took thought, and invented what I conceived to be the appropriate title of 'agnostic.' It came into my head as suggestively antithetic to the 'Gnostic' of Church history who professed to know so much about the very things of which I was ignorant. . . . To my great satisfaction, the term took; and when the *Spectator* had stood godfather to it, any suspicion in the minds of respectable people that a knowledge of its parentage might have awakened was, of course, completely lulled."

R. G. Collingwood recognized[2] that religious agnosticism

> "is worthy of honour and respect when it takes the form of the mind's self-abasement before divine mysteries in the face of which all our creeds are but childish prattle and all our worship a superstitious mummery; when, that is to say, it represents the recognition by religion of its own inability to solve its own problems. But when it is flaunted by a complacent religiosity as an excuse for believing anything it likes, in defiance of the protests made by the scientific and historical consciousness, it deserves nothing but the contempt which, happily, it as a rule excites."

True agnosticism is an element in true religion, and it has played a much larger part in the formation of living Christian faith than is commonly supposed. It is connected with an indispensable factor in true religion, profound humility before mystery.

But it is no more than an element, and it cannot remain sincere if it tries to isolate itself, to become self-sufficient. The polarity in genuine religion implies an agnostic element, an element of humility and doubt; but it also implies confidence and faith. To make the significance of this clear, I

[1] *Christianity and Agnosticism: A Controversy.*

[2] *Speculum Mentis* (Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 131.

would take an analogy. The Russian word which Nicolas Berdyaev uses for "chastity" is *tselomudrie*, which etymologically means "the wisdom of completeness." Berdyaev conceives original sin to be connected with the Fall of the androgyn,[1] that is, the man-woman, a complete being with the good masculine and the good feminine qualities perfectly integrated. Through the Fall this being is split into male and female, and the problem of recovering chastity (*tselomudrie*) is a complicated one, since men and women, being halved and sexual, are faced with an irresistible desire for each other while they are at the same time participants in a fierce cosmic struggle between the sexes, a struggle symbolized in the Œdipus myth to which Freud and other psycho-analysts have devoted so much attention. We have to reckon with both forces, and there is an element of sadism and masochism in the sexual life of both men and women. It is to the extent that an institution such as marriage solves the *whole* problem that it may be considered to be to any extent a solution. To attempt to solve one half or the other of the problem will result in no solution at all. Not all the sadistic orgies in the world, nor all the masochistic, can solve even a fraction of the secondary problems of sadism and masochism respectively, for these problems are insoluble except by the solution of a problem beyond them. The more we try to cope with the sadistic problem alone, the more sadistic and unhappy we become, for sadism is of course insatiable; with masochism it is the same. By dealing with the one problem at the expense of the other we push the other to the background where it gives more trouble than ever before. Antinomies must be recognized, and they take vengeance on those who fail to give them the recognition they demand, by causing them intense pyschological suffering. The extreme religious

[1] This anthropological myth has played an important part in literature: one need recall only Plato's *Symposium*.

agnostic who retires within an imaginary fortress of humility and doubt, and the fanatical dogmatist who rides forth in Quixotic fashion as a theological knight-errant, solve no problems. Not only is the one as much an ostrich as the other, but the one transforms humility and doubt into the most shabby pretence while the other makes a caricature of faith and so poisons his love that he generally becomes known rather for the singular cruelty of his hatred. There is little to choose between them, as there is little to choose between Nero and a quack fakir.

The antinomy of doubt and humility on the one hand and faith and love on the other must be faced squarely: it is only when both elements play their part that religion lives. Isolated agnosticism is as much a perversion of religion as is isolated dogmatism; nevertheless so long as agnosticism is open-minded it is not only "near religion" but a very part of it. People often complain of what they call "accretions" to the Christian faith; Unitarians, for instance, generally think of the doctrine of the Trinity in this way. Such doctrinal developments[1] seem to complicate a creed which would otherwise be simple; the Unitarian and Muslim views of God have the air of being much tidier. But it is to doubt rather than dogma that we are indebted for the development, which is a decrement as much as it is an increment, a simplification as much as a complication. This is not to say that this or that form of the doctrine that has been developed is perfect. It is the process that we are concerned to defend, not this or that result. It must strike us as very remarkable that there is more acute religious agnosticism in the early Christian Fathers than in Karl Marx or any of the Huxleys. There is plainly, however, much

[1] The doctrine of the Trinity is nowhere explicitly mentioned in the Bible, except in the interpolated passage, 1 *John* v. 7–8, which is found in no independent MS, and, even among the Latin Fathers, is not mentioned before the sixth century.

genuine agnosticism in many of the men commonly dubbed atheists: there was much in the atheist Diderot as well as in the intensely religious Kierkegaard; but whether it was genuine enough is a question we need not for our purposes explore. It is noteworthy nevertheless that both these men, who seem to typify diametrically opposed positions in regard to religion, adamantly refused the Viaticum on their death-beds. "The man whom doubt, pushed to its extreme consequences, has led to total indetermination may 'find' God or not. But if he find God, the faith of that man in God is immovable."[1] The Christian view is that if humility be deep enough it is a certain means of access to God, who "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble,"[2] for it is to the extent that it has gone deep that faith will spring from it and rise high. In Christian eyes faith which claims never to have known doubt must be highly suspect, as suspect as love which has known no pain; for such "faith" evidently knows no humility, and in the absence of humility what kind of faith can we expect?

It is above all for his humility that the religious agnostic wins respect from the most intensely religious people, and since it is notorious that such people habitually shock half-religious people, we need not be surprised to find these as hostile to the thoroughgoing Christian as they are to the extreme agnostic. By "half-religious" I mean that attitude which tries to solve the problems of religion without reference to the polarity to which I have referred and on the psychological aspect of which I shall have something to say in the next chapter.

[1] E.-Alexis Preyre, *A l'Extrême du scepticisme* (Paris, Fontaine, 1947), p. 168.

[2] *James* iv. 6.

CHAPTER VI

PSYCHOLOGICAL POLARITY

MODERN psychology is now very familiar with a principle of opposites comparable to that to which I have been referring. Freud's earliest observation of dreams led him to see them as wish-fulfilments: we attempt to satisfy in them our unconscious desires, which are generally in contrast to our conscious ones. In mental disturbances this antinomy appears to break down, as was long ago recognized: Freud himself cites[1] a list of writers who had perceived a connection between insanity and dreams; among these he mentions Pierre Cabanis,[2] Maine de Biran, Kant and Schopenhauer. The man whom bankruptcy has driven mad fancies himself fabulously rich; the miser whose avarice has gone so far as to unhinge his mind affects to worry about how to make ends meet, though he be assured on all sides that he has ample financial resources at his disposal. A girl unbalanced as a result of a disappointing love affair will imagine herself the recipient of countless offers of marriage, all rejected by her, or else she may invent for herself an entirely fictitious, lurid sexual past; while a woman whom sexual excess has mentally disturbed will go to great pains to establish her virginity. Freud recognized also, for example, how the sadistic component in a person's make-up is readily converted into its opposite, the masochistic component.

In Jung this general principle is widened and developed. His more inclusive use of *libido* as a term to denote all

[1] S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 3rd English edition (Allen & Unwin, 1932), p. 99.

[2] 1757–1808; his principal work, to which Freud refers, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, consists partly of memoirs read to the French Institute in 1796–97.

instinct-energies enables him to extend the principle considerably. In face of a seemingly insurmountable obstacle, the regressive *libido* replaces one form of adaptation by an abnormal or primitive one, so that neurosis can in general be considered as an act of adaptation which has failed. The outward personality of human beings is in fact often quite opposite in character to the inner structure of their minds. A timid, shy girl, for instance, may develop an air of self-confidence which so disguises her timidity that it not only causes others to mistake her for a bold, even insolent woman, but deceives at last even herself, so that she comes to forget that the outward personality she has diligently cultivated by way of camouflage does not represent her inner self at all. The hard crust developed as a measure of self-defence to make her mentally pachydermatous to injuries to which her temperament would otherwise have exposed her, at length obscures her inner nature to herself. As a result, the soft core of her mind underneath the outer crust becomes even softer, a prey to yet more serious injury below the level of consciousness. This phenomenon is a commonplace in war experience: the man who makes a special show of bravado under fire is not seldom the one who is most terrified at heart; the bully is often the worst coward; and so forth. Such psychological expedients are sometimes useful and may be no more harmful than the trick, learned by persons whom social duty compels to shake hands with large companies of people, of shaking hands not less but more vigorously than one would ordinarily do: it is less fatiguing to wring the hand of another than have him wring one's own. But to try to solve major psychological problems in such a superficial way is to court trouble.

All this is so well known to psycho-analysts that those who have accustomed themselves to their outlook tend to *expect* that people should be the opposite of what a casual peep at their outward personalities would suggest.

Exaggerated behaviour of any kind is in this regard rightly more than ordinarily suspect. Such suspicions were common centuries before Freud was born: in *Hamlet* Shakespeare attributes insight of this kind to the Queen when she says of the Player Queen, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks."[1] We naturally suspect people who are ostentatiously polite, orderly, prudish or cordial, for it is not improbable that they will be respectively rude, untidy, lascivious, cold, at heart. The more we cherish good manners the more we distrust a striking affectation of them; the greater the value we set on sexual purity the keener our distaste for the prude. Certain classes are popularly suspect. It is true that not all clergymen are power-hunters, nor all politicians unscrupulous; but since the clergyman is by profession supposed to be a man of extraordinary humility, and the politician one whose altruism makes him conspicuously worthy of confidence, there is *prima facie* a fair case against them in the popular mind which, though notoriously prone to err in its judgments, is not without considerable psychological insight. The religious fanatic, the extreme dogmatist, is suspected of having not too much but too little religious enthusiasm and brotherly love; it is feared that he will be at heart a selfish, irreligious misanthropist, the opposite of his pretentions, as indeed is not infrequently the case.

Modern psychology does much to corroborate the Christian valuations we have proposed, notably in our review of the importance of humility in the Christian scale of moral values. Some Christian writers in recent times have drawn attention to the way in which psychological insight changes our moral valuations, though they have not always appreciated to what extent the moral valuations of orthodox theologians have been more consonant with modern psycho-analytical findings than is commonly

[1] *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 2, line 240.

supposed; it was the popular interpretation of the Christian ethic which was as bad psychology as it was bad theology. One writer[1] relates how a man came to him in great distress because of having defrauded a railway company of a few shillings, several years previously. The man had, of course, done wrong; but, as his counsellor was quick to detect, his having cheated the railway company was a venial offence compared with the pride he was now exhibiting in making a great fuss over his sense of guilt. Behind his show of fine scruple was a phantasy of the moral perfection he supposed himself to have subsequently acquired! "Not many people would even remember such a trivial offence; yet such is the delicacy of my conscience. . . ." This writer is probably mistaken, however, in supposing that "a priest might have commended him for his tenderness of conscience, whereas he would better have condemned him for his moral snobbery," since even in the less enlightened seminaries for prospective confessors so much warning is given about the pride behind scruples of this kind that it is unlikely that even a young priest would be deceived by these. Yet so distorted is the popular view of the Christian attitude to moral values that the author's reminder is welcome. We all find it hard to detect our own phantasies: one of the same writer's patients, asked whether he had phantasies of self-importance, gave the amusing reply: "Oh, no! I think much less of myself *than I really am.*"[2]

It should surprise no one then that people who make a great show of dogmatism in religion on the one hand and those who on the other parade their religious scepticism are more closely related to each other than is either class to genuinely religious people in whom the faith/doubt antinomy is recognized and faced. The same is true of other antinomies: it is by facing them, taking account of them,

[1] J. A. Hadfield, in *Psychology and Morals*, 14th edition (Methuen, 1946), p. 65.

[2] *Idem*, p. 64.

that we best equip ourself to escape the pitfalls into which they are capable of leading us when we try to cope with the situation by pretending that they are not there. The closed mind and the proud heart affect to recognize no antinomies because these have enslaved them; the open mind and humble heart are acutely conscious of the danger, though they are putting themselves in the way of averting it. Religion appears to be paradoxical because, recognizing paradox, it is in the way of conquering it. Outside genuine religion, great paradoxes are unwelcome since there is little hope of understanding them; they frighten people who have not faced up to the religious challenge, as the responsibilities of adult life frighten the adolescent who is trying to cling to the psychological irresponsibilities of immaturity. Yet at every level love offers a way of liberation from self. This may be true in some measure of even the less altruistic kinds of sexual love: Freud has maintained that in a "normal" love-life neurosis is impossible. I should prefer to say—and Jung's view would be nearer to what I suggest—that while the direction of *libido* to a goal inspired by love affords both respite from the danger of neurosis and the means of education towards a goal that will provide still greater opportunities for escape, only the most altruistic kind of love can assure our ultimate cure. After all, the kind of neuroses with which Freud was chiefly concerned is, as Jung discovered, not the worst or the most insusceptible to cure. Far worse, Jung found, are neuroses arising from the profounder problems of middle and later life; and worst of all, I would suggest, are those born of failure to make the necessary psychological adaptations in response to the demands of religion. It is remarkable to what extent religion, especially genuine religion, fascinates people who appear to give very little thought to it. There is no subject, not even sex, which has in greater measure the mysterious power of rousing widespread public curiosity, so long as its

discussion shows no sign of becoming profound and its demands no sign of becoming urgent. The gravest, most deep-seated psychological difficulties of humanity seem to spring from failure to cope with the religious problem. It is true that many highly neurotic people are attracted to religion—tuberculous people are often attracted to the mountains—and their cure is not to be expected to be immediately apparent. Moreover, a person who has attained integration through religion when all else has failed often carries over subsidiary neurotic disturbances which seem never to be fully remedied: a patient whom radiotherapy cured of a deep-rooted cancer would have little ground for complaint that the treatment had not at the same time removed a pimple on his chin. The purpose of religion, so far as its therapeutic aspect is concerned, is to attend to trouble arising from failure to cope with fundamental antinomies.[1]

One of these, I am contending, is the antinomy of faith and doubt. The way towards true liberalism in religion is opened up only through taking this antinomy fully into account. Latitudinarianism is not liberalism; it is nearer obscurantism, the deliberate refusal to consider doubt, and this is religion's mortal enemy. Obscurantism, Protestant or Catholic, churchy or worldly, betokens psychological failure of the kind most damaging to religious progress, by which I mean here the integration of the psyche at its most radical level. But an excessively loud, "hysterical" accent on liberalism rouses well-founded suspicions of the kind to which I have been alluding; that is, such an apologist is not unlikely to turn out to be anything else rather than liberal in outlook. Spending the summer of 1938 in Germany, I noticed that what was above all commended to me on every hand, as the finest of the fine fruits of National Socialism purveyed by Hitler, was personal liberty.

[1] We recall the anecdote about Miss X, *supra*, p. 44 f.

It need hardly be said that one must not, however, press the significance of this psychological phenomenon too far. A cool manner is no guarantee of an ardent disposition, nor would one suspect that every warm smile that greets one hides a chilly heart. A readiness either to believe or to doubt does not in itself warrant any suspicion; such propensities must be very remarkable before they may come to be regarded as symptoms of neurotic disturbance. Yet we ought never to lose sight of the psychological fact that by nature human beings put a mask over their true motives, and do this so effectively from one point of view that even when they look in the mirror, psychologically speaking, they come to see only their thus masked personalities. That St. Paul, on the very eve of his conversion, was "yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"[1] is psychologically explicable; but it is questionable whether the unconverted Saul would have so vividly described his behaviour, for he may well have at that time depicted himself to himself as a man of exemplary fair-mindedness. It is only when we have taken a step towards the integration of our personality that we can know how inadequate, to say no more, was our self-portrait before we took that step. To take such a step we need that kind of faith which is born within the faith/doubt antinomy.

[1] *Acts*, ix. 1; cf. *supra*, p. 46.

CHAPTER VII

FAITH, DOUBT AND LAUGHTER

THE relevance of laughter to religion is a not unimportant subject for investigation. Hardly anything would be more descriptive of the general climate of a religion, the ethos of a Church, than the kind of mirth it engenders. If the mirth of the *koinonia* be lively, kindly and delicate, we may be surer than we can be from almost any other evidence that the *koinonia* is in a good state of spiritual health. This is almost the last thing, however, that a descriptive text-book can disclose to the world, since it cannot hope to capture anything so peculiarly elusive in such a way as to inform those outside the fellowship. It is only to the extent that one is in some way already "inside" that one can in the least appreciate the particular kind of fun inseparable from the life of the religious community, and so no missionary purpose would be served by any such attempted description. The only way of laying hold of any aspect of religion so intimately bound to its life is to participate in some way in the full current of the life itself. Yet when this feature of living religion is not exhibited, the picture we have of the religion must be so inadequate as to be grossly misleading. Lack of humour is deadly enough in any sphere; but a religion without humour is as dead as the dust in a plush pew-cushion.

The bibliography of the psychology of laughter is very extensive; yet on the question of the relevance of laughter to religion hardly anything has been written. There springs to mind, of course, as a clue to this problem, Bergson's theory, probably still the most widely known and most vigorously criticized, that laughter is a social gesture, a

"kind of social 'ragging'."[1] Every society is obliged to invent something of this sort by way of self-defence; because it is a society it is in some way separate from the world outside, and it is the stiffness of some of the habits of this world that it must break down in order to justify its own existence. Initiation into the society therefore generally entails social discipline intended to laugh the initiate out of his stiffness and make him more pliable, by way of fitting him for genuine participation in the society's life. On the other hand, "laughter is incompatible with emotion;" that is, as soon as a situation which would otherwise be funny moves my sympathy, fear or pity, I can no longer laugh at it. Though it is to the anti-social contradistinguished from the immoral that laughter tends to be directed, a clever *raconteur* can make us laugh even at that which would ordinarily shock or distress us; but he can do so only by anæsthetizing our emotion, so to speak, for the comic "is addressed to pure intelligence."[2] In this aloofness from emotion it would seem to have some affinity with art, to which Bergson compares it; yet it is sharply contrasted with art since this attends to the individualization of perceptions rather than to generalities and types, while comedy follows social impulses; so it is "intermediate between art and life."[3]

This view of the nature and function of laughter has much to commend it, and appears to account for some of the phenomena of laughter. But it does not account for all of them, and as an explanation of the peculiar kind of laughter associated with the life of genuine religion it is inadequate. Heine has a poem consisting of four stanzas each depicting very different situations ranging from the gay to the tragic, and each stanza ends with the words "and she laughed." It is unlikely that any uniform explanation could account for such different kinds of laughter, and the field of

[1] Henri Bergson, *Le Rire*, 8th edition (Paris, Alcan, 1912), c. 3, p. 138.
[2] *Idem*, p. 142. [3] *Idem*, p. 175.

religion is so complex that though Bergson's theory may be partly true even here, it is hard to see how it could do justice to such an intricate phenomenon as humour in religion. The phenomena which Bergson's theory might explain are by no means the most characteristic. To the extent that religion is social, Bergson's view would be helpful, even if it did not explain all; but religion is not simply a social phenomenon. Sectarian gibes, for instance, may well be explained as social gestures, since in the measure that a religion is sectarian it is not radically different from any other social organization or club. The Episcopalian minority in Scotland used to be greeted by their adversaries in the doggerel cry, disparaging their devotional practices,

> 'Piskie, 'Piskie, Amen !
> Down on your knees and up again.

But the more erudite gibe against the Scottish Presbyterians,

> O Scotland ! Thee a double darkness mocks !
> Thy name is Σκοτία, and thy teacher (K)Nox,

is no less susceptible to a Bergsonian interpretation.

In the kind of humour which I have in mind as specifically connected with living religion, there is evidence of much greater complexity. Here one would do better to follow up a clue casually provided by Freud when he recounts that "Goethe said of Lichtenberg: 'Where he cracks a joke, there lies a concealed problem'."[1] This might well be said of Socrates. Nor need the problem be soluble in terms of Freud's comparatively simple theory of wit. I think it may be intimately connected, however, with the psychological principle of polarity to which the preceding chapter has been devoted, though one could not hope fully to explain the nature of the problem on a psychological basis alone.

Neither the religious fanatic nor the violently anti-

[1] S. Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, authorized English edition (Penguin Books, 1938), p. 136.

religious propagandist laughs much about religion. The former, who is often morose by temperament and sombre in outlook, generally holds that religion is too sacrosanct to be the subject of mirth in any circumstances without risk of blasphemy. The latter usually whips his indignation to a point which it requires a certain moral inelasticity on his part to maintain. For the one a religious dogma or proposition or rule of life is too indisputably right in every way to allow him to permit himself even a faint smile; for the other it is in every way too unquestionably wrong for that. They may both indulge in wit or humour of a kind, the one in a sort of fierce satire, the other in simple ribaldry. But it is neither to the satirist nor to the buffoon that we must look for the kind of humour which presents the interesting problem relevant to our investigation.

There is an intellectual quality in the most pungent wit and in the most profound humour which makes an appreciative reaction to these a very different thing from the reaction proper to, say, a coarse jest. If our reaction to the latter be not a yawn, it can be only a guffaw; it is hardly more than physiological. The coarse jest may as well be about religion as about anything else; a cheap punster, for instance, might as well use theological as any other terms for his purpose. But such jests are not even commonplace examples of what I mean by religious wit or humour.

Let us take a familiar example, at a very simple level, of genuine laughter about religion, the "St Peter" story. For a Christian to tell such a story betokens no inconsistency or insincerity on his part. On the contrary, he is probably capable of telling such a story better than most people could do, because his faith is most doubt-sifted. "In nothing," says Goethe, "do men show their character more clearly than by what they find laughable." But the Christian is not laughing at St Peter; even less is he laughing at the notion of personal immortality. He is laughing at himself. It is

because of his certitude concerning heaven that the notion of this being localized, with a golden gate behind which St Peter performs the office of celestial hall-porter, so thoroughly amuses him. The picturesque notion of St Peter creaking open golden gates and scrutinizing candidates for the celestial hierarchy would be hardly even picturesque to a young man or woman brought up in a thoroughly neo-pagan circle completely devoid of all hope of personal immortality. Anyone who questions this statement may verify it by trying out such a joke on such a person brought up in a modern totalitarian state. Accepting as axiomatic a presupposition against personal immortality, such a neo-pagan would find the content of the joke so absurd that he could see no fun in it. On the other hand, the tale might shock a person who, feebly and not very effectively trying to force himself into belief in a future life, misunderstood the joke as mere ribaldry. He might suppose that the person telling the story was blasphemously daring to laugh at Christian faith, though in fact this person might be very properly laughing at his own inadequacy in expressing the mystery of his faith. It is this capacity for laughing at oneself which is peculiar to those whose faith is doubt-sifted. There are certain circles in which it causes grave misunderstanding to relate a story against oneself. I remember once making this mistake in the company of a small gathering of young Germans: they looked puzzled, thinking I was not quite sane. All persons whose presuppositions, whether they purport to be religious or irreligious, contain no implicate of doubt, share in some way that dull attitude. It would not be easy for them to fancy that mirth, if only because it may prevent us from taking ourselves more seriously than we ought, may be an important part of the revelation of God.[1]

This is not to say that mirth is the right response to all

[1] Cf. F. W. Harvey, *Ducks*, in *Poems of To-day*, Second Series (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1922), p. 47.

religious situations. On the contrary, religion often implies a grim intellectual struggle and always entails strenuous moral effort. It is hardly to be expected that one should always laugh in the midst of this; yet mirth is never very far away from the loving heart, apart from which, from a Christian point of view, all moral striving is vain. That kind of laughter which springs from humility in face of doubt springs no less from the certitude that has its source in love. It is not insignificant that love and laughter traditionally go hand in hand; they do so at every level of experience, and neither can be sustained unless the quality of the one keep pace with the quality of the other.

A Christian also often laughs at jokes which are intended to be against God or religion, because he sees in them fun which escapes their perpetrators. I remember Dr Visser 't Hooft once saying that it amused him when he heard the Philistines recount the shortcomings and failures of those within the Church, not because they were wrong in supposing Christians to make mistakes, but because these made more and far worse mistakes than the Philistines suspected. What seems to the enemies of the Church to be an argument against Christianity is to the Church so much an argument in its favour (only a divinely instituted and sustained society could have survived so much human folly within) that many now see that it would be better for Christians to expound their history with a stronger accent on the human follies and failures which the Church has survived, and on the doubts beyond which Christian faith has buoyantly risen. A superficially religious person might be distressed by a cartoon depicting a high-explosive bomb stopping suddenly in mid-air in answer to the orizons of the faithful; but a profound Christian might well smile. He would see behind the notion an intellectual confusion, a deep truth confused with a vulgar error. He would laugh not because he repudiated belief in the omnipotence of God, but on the

contrary because his faith in this was so invigorated by having been sifted with doubt that he could perceive fun that would elude the casual observer. He would see, for instance, that the cartoon restricted rather than fully exhibited the divine omnipotence: Christian faith is so wonderful that the notion of its being represented in anything so humdrum as a bomb stopping in mid-air is somewhat amusing. Before Pasteur stimulated research in the etiology of infective conditions, his contention that bacteria could produce diseases, and that consequently it might be dangerous to operate, for example, with an instrument which had fallen on the floor, was a fertile source of popular jokes. But to a modern bacteriologist a nineteenth-century cartoon depicting a surgeon, unmasked, boiling his instruments before use, would appear funny for a very different reason. The surgeon would seem funny not because he was being fastidious, but because he was not being nearly fastidious enough.

Moreover, in the works of writers renowned for their supposed scepticism about religion we find allusions which shed light on the nature of their scepticism, suggesting that it may be something very different from what it is commonly supposed to be. James Joyce, for instance, was nothing if not sceptical. Whether in one of his boyishly mischievous or in one of his most pedantic moods, he seems never to miss an opportunity of poking fun at the religion in which he was educated. Yet Joyce is no more a blasphemer than he is on the side of the angels. He is laughing at his own oscillation between doubt and belief. It may very well be true that Joyce's faith did not triumph over his doubt; I should prefer not to feel too sure about that. But at any rate his position is healthier than that of one who refuses to laugh at the faith/doubt antinomy within himself. It is remarkable how, despite his scepticism, Joyce recurs over and over again to the paraphernalia of theological orthodoxy as he knew this. The triple "Sandhyas!" which opens the

last book of *Finnegans Wake*[1] is in some sense "christian minstrelsy."[2] And perhaps none of his innumerable portmanteau words is more typically Joycian than his "thurifex."[3] A thoroughgoing unbeliever could not sufficiently interest himself in such themes to sustain this sort of cleverness for so long. I do not suggest that the faith/doubt antinomy has produced in Joyce all the fruits that, from a Christian point of view, it might have done. But a healthy psychological fruit of it is laughter, and Joyce provides this abundantly. His work is no more merely blasphemous than it is merely pornographic, and it is certainly far too sexually disgusting to be this. Those who thought him blasphemous misunderstood him worse than even Baudelaire was misunderstood; they failed to appreciate the place of scepticism in religion. Even the most profound theologian, contemplating his exposition in systematic form, must smile at the extent to which it falls short of even his own Christian faith; else he is quite bogus.

It has often been remarked that a sense of humour is the best safeguard against fantastic delusions, and in no field is this more true than in religion, in the eyes of which the universe is, as Dante called it,[4] "a universal smile." By no means all laughter is of this order: much of it is shallow, and some no more than a safeguard against tears, as it is

[1] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Faber & Faber, 1939), p. 593. *Sandhyas* is a Sanskrit word meaning "twilight," representing in Hindu lore the period of junction between æons. Joyce has in mind the *Sanctus*, from the Preface of the Roman Mass. Cf. Campbell and Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (Faber & Faber, 1947), p. 278, where it is claimed by Joyce's commentators that the standpoint of the last book of *Finnegans Wake* is "far beyond the simple antinomy of optimism and pessimism." A few lines further on in the text (p. 594) Joyce is punning again: *agnitest* (ignitest) plays on the Sanskrit *agni* (fire), and recalls the *Agnus Dei*.

[2] *Idem*, p. 3. The work of the artist is a kind of ministry, and Joyce's "minstrelsy," a literary technique more auditory than visual, is perhaps not so anti-Christian as is often supposed, being, rather, *a*-Christian.

[3] A mixture of "thurifer" and "crucifix."

[4] *Paradiso*, canto 27, lines 4–5: "un riso dell 'universo."

for those who "hasten to laugh at everything for fear of being obliged to weep."[1] But the mirth springing from genuine self-forgetfulness in face of the ambivalence of one's own doubt and faith may express one of the most valuable elements in the genuine scepticism which plays an indispensable part in lively Christian faith. The social character of jesting, may, however, partly explain its power as an instrument in religion's hands, as Stevenson hinted when he said that, "You could read Kant by yourself, if you wanted; but you must share a joke with someone else."[2] It may even be that in the most lively Christian scepticism the joke is shared with God.

[1] Beaumarchais, *Le Barbier de Séville*, Act I, Sc. 2.
[2] R. L. Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque*, Part I.

CHAPTER VIII

SILENCE

SILENCE has always played an important part in religious practice, both within and without Christendom. "The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."[1] This injunction is all the more remarkable since another Hebrew writer, in a vein no less characteristically Biblical, enjoins "everything that hath breath" to utter praises to God.[2] It would seem moreover that such silence implies more than simply a state propitious for the reception of the divine impact, for such receptivity is not incompatible with the most eloquent praise.

What then is the special significance of silence in religion? The devotional ritual of most religions provides a time for silence. Within Christendom certain sects, particularly the Society of Friends, and certain monastic orders, notably, since the Abbot de Rancé's day, the Trappist, seem to the ordinary observer to make a fetish of it. In circles in which extempore prayer, as it is called, plays an important part in worship, an interpolated silence is often the most intimate part of the prayer. In Britain it has become the practice on Remembrance Day to observe a silence of two minutes by way of commemoration of the fallen. The Canon, the most solemn part of the Roman Mass, is marked by silence broken only by the whispered words of institution. "Here is something," writes Charles Lamb, describing a Quakers' meeting, "which throws Antiquity herself into

[1] *Habakkuk*, ii. 20. Cf. *Zech.* ii. 13.
[2] *Psalms*, cl., 6.

the foreground—Silence—eldest of things—language of old Night—primitive Discourser."[1] There is plainly a special religious significance in the Quaker emphasis on silence in gatherings such as that which Lamb admired as an "unmischievous synod," a "convocation without intrigue," a "parliament without debate."[2] Quaker silence must be understood in relation to the Society's attitude to doctrine. The Quakers have always opposed rigid definitions, even on doctrines such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, though Quaker faith has often been strong in its testimony to these. In line with this has been their attitude towards the Bible, which attitude paradoxically but happily saved them from manifesting that obstinately stupid hostility which was at first shown by the conservative churchmen of most other Christian denominations towards modern Biblical criticism.[3] That which, doctrinally, the Society of Friends has so peculiarly stressed, in the face of the most bitter persecution, is the implicate of faith which we call doubt.

[1] Charles Lamb, *The Essays of Elia* (Nelson, n.d.), p. 67.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] William Robertson Smith was removed in 1881 from his chair in the Free Church College, Aberdeen, as a result of the articles on Biblical subjects which he had written for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and for his general attitude towards the Bible, which, though moderate in comparison with that of even the immediately succeeding decades, was contrary to the old-fashioned Protestant orthodoxy of the Free Church of Scotland, whose authorities removed him. This was exactly fifty years after the General Assembly of the Established Church of Scotland had, in 1831, deposed from its ministry the saintly John McLeod Campbell, for having taught, contrary to Calvinistic standards, that Christ died for all men.

In regard to the latter heresy hunt, A. J. Campbell, an ex-Moderator of the General Assembly, remarks that Chalmers, the leader of the Scottish Disruption of 1843, who of all men might have been expected to speak at McLeod Campbell's trial, was silent. (*Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland*, 1707–1929; Paisley, Gardner, 1930 ; p. 196.) Referring, in the same place, to the deposition of Edward Irving, which happened about the same time, Dr A. J. Campbell gives an interesting clue to its explanation, when he speaks of "the Evangelical mind, always inclined to assert the fixity of dogma."

It may well be that it has over-stressed this, as it may equally well be that it has exaggerated the place of silence in worship; but that its emphases, in doctrine and practice respectively, are related, seems very plain.

The silence specially associated with Quaker worship is a liturgical feature common to all Christian devotion and strange to no religion even outside Christendom. Perhaps here, even if nowhere else, might be found a Common Order for all Christians, since no one would quarrel with the notion that silence is an indispensable part of the cultus. One of the most notorious sources of Christianity's disunity is the divergence of liturgical practice in Holy Communion ; yet in the silences which form part of every Communion office in the world every honest Christian must feel at home. Worship without silence of some kind is almost inconceivable; at any rate such worship would hardly be religious worship at all. Even in the crudest religious meeting there must always be some sort of momentary hush, at least, be it only between hymn and prayer, to express liturgically a healthy doubt concerning the adequacy of our formulations of Christian belief.

Silence plays a conspicuous part in the Rule of St Benedict, and is one of the most obvious distinguishing marks of the type of religious life followed by all the ancient orders and many of the more modern congregations in the Latin Church. In part the practice of silence in conventual houses is no more than an expedient for enabling the brethren to concentrate on their tasks and carry out expeditiously their heavy programme of work: not only can one pray and study better in silence, say the monks; one can also peel more potatoes. The Trappists, who toil as much in the fields as they pore over old tomes in the scriptorium or sing their office in the choir, never speak except to God, to the Abbot (whose commands they interpret as God's will), to guests of the community when they are charged with the duty of

attending to these, and in case of necessity (to explain a projected task, for example), though then only to the extent that the situation urgently demands it. But the monastic silence is more than a practical expedient for getting work done, for though monks work hard it is not the end of the contemplative life to peel as many potatoes as possible. To sustain their deepest faith the monks need silence; likewise, the Trappists say, they can best find their solitude in the midst of the community.[1] This extraordinary accent on silence which makes even monks of the more ordinary observance seem almost worldly to Trappist eyes may be exaggerated; but its significance appears to lie in the fact that silence is a devotional expression of that doubt which, the beginning of philosophy, is an implicate of religious faith. Silence expresses agnosticism of one kind or another; reverent silence expresses reverent agnosticism. But the silence of the Trappists, though called "perpetual," is in fact broken daily in choir where by two o'clock in the morning every day of the year they are installed to sing together the divine praise.

Paradoxically, this view of the religious significance of silence is not incompatible with Pascal's profound utterance: "Silence is the greatest persecution: the saints never held their tongue."[2] For here Pascal is referring to the religious necessity of protest, which has been considered in an earlier chapter. But it is one thing to feel the obligation of voicing the protests of others, to protest in the name of the Church, and another to protest within one's own mind against one's own beliefs. In the former case one is playing

[1] The Prior of the Grande Trappe once told me that the rule which obliges Trappists, whether in church, in the fields, in the study or in the dormitory, to be never alone, is their most severe penance. While they become accustomed to the silence, the lack of physical solitude grows more and more irksome as the years pass.

[2] H. F. Stewart, *The Heart of Pascal* (Cambridge University Press, 1945). p. 39. Cf. Pascal, *Lettres écrites à un Provincial* (Paris, Garnier, 1921), p. 380.

the rôle of advocate, whose office is to speak; in the latter case one is alone with God. Silence may be the perfect expression of interior protest: arraigned before the High Priest, Jesus "held his peace;"[1] accused by the chief priests and elders he "answered nothing."[2] One may protest either by speaking or by holding one's tongue, as one may or may not utter one's doubt; but it seems to me to be religiously significant that in silence free play is given to both doubt and faith. Plainly it is never the theologian's duty to be silent, *qua* theologian, any more than it is the duty of a teacher of philosophy to be silent before his pupils; but liturgically silence has a peculiar significance: its function in worship is comparable to that of doubt in the mind of the philosopher. It is noteworthy that the Society of Friends, renowned for their stress on liturgical silence, like to be considered, as generally they are, the mystical wing of English Puritanism. The word "mysticism" is derived from a Greek word which implies secrecy or silence.[3] Emptiness and darkness are other liturgical features with a similar mystical significance. Before the *fiat lux*, "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."[4] There can never be a *fiat lux* without some kind of void or darkness; nor can there be a Word without silence.

I am not forgetting the primitive, magical origin of silence. In primitive religion, silence was kept for fear of uttering words of evil omen. There is evidently a survival of this magical outlook in much religion which has sur-

[1] *St Matt.*, xxvi. 63. Cf. *Isaiah*, liii. 7.

[2] *St Matt.*, xxvii. 12.

[3] μύω, the root of which is pronounced by closing the lips in the manner in which they are closed as a natural gesture to enjoin silence. One recalls the phrase of an eighteenth-century English dramatist, "Mum's the word." (George Colman the Younger, *The Battle of Hexham*, Act II, Scene 1).

[4] *Genesis*, i. 2.

passed the magical stage. It is found, for instance, in a somewhat conspicuous form in certain aspects of Gothic architecture and in some renderings of the music of Bach. But it can no more be said that silence is essentially magical than that speech is this; that magicians have used speech provides no argument against its use. Christian silence has a specific character. It is like the mystic's *via negativa*: "God is *not* this, God is *not* that." The mystic does not tell us that God is not a plum-pudding; he refers to an apprehension of God which has been formed, and indicates that God is *beyond* that. As the apprehension is somehow related to God, so the mystic silence is related to divine worship. It is implied in this, as that which the worship surpasses. Lord Hewart is reported to have said, describing a day on the bench, "Sometimes I sit and think, and sometimes I just sit."[1] The silence of the Christian mystic is no more the mere absence of speech than sitting on the judicial bench is the mere absence of standing up and moving about. The liturgical silence expresses a specific attitude of mind, that attitude by which we are put at the cross-roads in our approach to God. It is a kind of liturgical agnosticism. One cannot fail to remark how intimately is Quaker silence connected with the Quaker doctrine of Inner Light.[2] Apart from this the Quaker silence would have little meaning, and no liturgical silence could mean much apart from a doctrine concerning the filling of the silence. The silence of the Trappist life would be cruel and meaningless apart from the monks' daily choral praise, in which they speak for the Church to God.

In less extreme examples, the same principle holds: the bigot, be he worldling or zealot, is afraid of finding himself

[1] Sir Gervais Rentoul, *Sometimes I Think* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), p. 5.

[2] I must add however that silence is not that which most impressed me about the very few Quaker meetings I happen to have attended. But neither was it the genuine agnosticism of the speakers.

faced either with silence or with doubt, because he knows that to be in such positions means opening his mind and laying bare his heart to influences which might disturb his eloquent prejudices. But wherever there is lively faith there is love of silence as there is love of self-questioning. A tongue too glib is in its own way as incompetent in the presence of what theists call God and agnostics The Unknown, as is in such presence too self-confident a mind.

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CHAPTER IX

THE FEAR OF DOUBT

THE notion that religion is born of fear is even more ancient than the ancient tag, frequently quoted, *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*.[1] It is a view which has its protagonists in every age. During the past century it has come to take a form, now well known, which suggests that religion is a means of escape from unpleasant facts which men naturally fear. Confronted with these facts, so the theory goes, men invented gods to give themselves a sense of security and protect themselves from the unpalatable truths of which they were afraid. It is very disagreeable, for instance, to feel ourselves thrown down on the face of the earth, *jeté là, comme ça*, as Sartre would say, in an unintelligible universe which becomes more perplexing the more we examine and experience it. So we spin out of our heads what Feuerbach called "wish-beings" (*Wunschwesen*) or "personified wishes" (*personifizierte Wünsche*), in whom we can put our trust and find security from fear.

This theory raises numerous difficulties; but perhaps the most curious of these lies in the fact that, according to the theory, religion, having escape from fear as its sole *raison d'être*, proceeds to inculcate into the minds of its devotees fears far more horrible than any that could possibly have been encountered outside it. There is, for instance, no empirical fact, even the use of atomic energy for war, which is half so terrifying as the prospect of everlasting torment in hell. Such a prospect arises only in religion, the alleged accommodation of the empirical facts to our personified wishes. Yet so terrifying to the millions who have

[1] Statius, *Thebais*, Bk. 3, line 661.

believed in everlasting punishment has been the prospect of it, that some of them have suffered the most bitter deprivations, endured the most intense psychological anguish, undergone even the excruciating agony of martyrdom by burning at the stake, rather than run the risk of hell.[1] For while Canon Dearmer is right in saying that mediæval writers such as Comines were mistaken in supposing that "if only everyone would realise what hell torments are like, the whole world would become virtuous,"[2] he is himself mistaken in his view that it was bad psychology on the part of mediæval and other theologians to expect the fear of hell to restrain mankind, since it is indisputable that countless persons refrained through fear of hell from actions which they would otherwise have done. Rightly or wrongly (this is not an eschatological inquiry) the fear of hell has had an enormous influence in promoting action which religious leaders approved and restraining action which they disapproved. Even in modern times, the remarkable career of the Salvation Army, from its foundation in 1878 as a London street-mission to its present renown as a rich international organization, owes much to the enthusiasm with which the early Salvationist leaders stimulated a terror of hell-fire in their audiences.[3]

It is indeed one of the stock reproaches of writers against Christianity that its protagonists have so extensively used fear as a lever to move men. And such is the reaction against the old emphasis on hell that the popular Protestant explanation of the fact that nearly all Roman Catholic churches in Great Britain today are uncomfortably crowded while most

[1] I am not suggesting that this has been a typical motive of the Christian martyrs, but only that it could be, and in some cases probably was, a contributory motive.

[2] Percy Dearmer, *The Legend of Hell* (Cassell, 1929), p. 84.

[3] The founder, William Booth, is reported by a biographer to have declared in a letter to his future wife, written in 1854, that people "must have hell-fire flashed in their faces, or they will not move": H. Begbie, *The Life of William Booth* (Macmillan, 1920), vol. 1, p. 228.

others are uncomfortably empty, namely, that Roman Catholics go to church through fear, does much to console many who might otherwise be dispirited by the contrast. For nowadays the worst condemnation of a religion, in the popular view, is that it makes use of the emotion of fear. Yet the fact that fear such as I have described has played such a large part in religion is remarkable in view of the other reproach of Christianity's antagonists that people fly to religion to escape their fear of hard facts. It would seem that Pascal's hypothesis that hostility to religion arises itself from fear that religion may be true, is one which better fits the case, since religion, far from providing its ordinary devotees with release from fears, notoriously instils worse fears into them; it would seem that instead of offering the world what the world wants to believe, Christianity often offers the reverse. It is true that there are aspects of religion which are psychologically congenial to humanity. As a means of escape from the demands of the world, Christianity has some attractive features. But to fill the rôle the psychoanalysts would give it, it would require more than some such features. One does not choose to undertake the hardships of an Arctic expedition simply because one is bored by the dullness of one's job in the Colonial Service in a tropical outpost. Though in such circumstances the life of an Arctic explorer might present many attractive features, to leave the fear of tropical ennui for the fear of misadventures in the Arctic would be a poor exchange.

Not all assailants of Christianity, however, are unaware of this type of argument. Some of them, in order to overcome it, deftly turn it once again. May it not be the spirit of adventure that accounts for the deliberate choice of many new burdens, moral and psychological, imposed by religion and *ex hypothesi* escapable outside it? For though Jesus called his yoke easy and his burden light,[1] this generally

[1] *St Matt.* xi. 30.

seems to the neophyte encountering for the first time the heavy demands of the Christian life to be a promise rather than a statement of his own actual condition. As an apology against Christianity this adventure-theory is not satisfactory, since many, it may be most, devotees of religion are timid rather than adventuresome at heart. But it does lead us to consider an interesting phenomenon, namely, the fear of the adventure of beholding mystery, a fear of which neither religious people nor others seem to have a monopoly. They are afraid of the moral responsibility of freedom to doubt. "Ye shall know the truth," says Christ, "and the truth shall make you free."[1] But to be free to contemplate mystery is rarely welcomed by the average member of the average Christian congregation of any denomination, age or latitude. Tending to be almost as dogmatic as the worldling, he craves to answer the world in its own dogmatic language.

This fear of the personal responsibility of facing mystery and doubt honestly is one of the most curious of the phenomena noticed by observant clergy of all denominations, especially those who have studied psycho-analysis seriously; but it is a phenomenon more than ordinarily noticeable in congregations of the "emancipated" type in the fashionable quarters of large cities.[2] These are the people who, fearing both God and man, are more dogmatic than even those who fear man and not God. They try to get the best of both worlds by evolving hybrid dogmas based on the weaknesses and follies of both sides. Rather than run the risk of facing mystery and doubt, such persons will

[1] *St John* viii. 32.

[2] Two clergymen whom I personally remember particularly for their stress on the phenomenon differed widely in background and outlook, one an American Protestant, the other a French Catholic; but both of them had read widely in psycho-analysis and both drew their conclusions from experience in "emancipated" spheres, the one a rich congregation in New York, the other a Parisian cure in the fashionable *seizième*. It is unfortunate that "democratic" agitations in the Christian society so very often betoken no more than a terror of doubt and mystery.

force themselves into beliefs more preposterous than anything imposed by the historic confessions ever seems to be to the world. For many the Johannine saying I have quoted must be accounted, unconsciously at any rate, the hardest saying in the Gospels. The number of people who genuinely welcome the responsibility that sincere Christian discipleship involves is small in relation to the number of people who dread it, and this is one point which Catholicism and Protestantism, High and Low Church, Broad and Narrow Church, all have to some extent in common.

We have seen that both the argument that religion is born of fear and the argument that it owes its existence to man's need to provide himself with "wish-beings" in order to escape unpleasant facts, fail to account for the fact of religion. A much more formidable objection to religion, however, is that, no matter what be its origin, it does not seem to get its average devotee to accept that kind of moral responsibility to which I have alluded, in the way in which it is supposed to do. It is true that this may raise the very profound and complex problem of what freedom is; but without our necessarily being led into a consideration of that problem, I think we may admit that it is indisputable that whatever religion may do for some it cannot even pretend to do more for others, the "average Christians," the "half-religious," than change their fetters. These persons, who are likely to be in the majority, can hardly be said to be much less enslaved by the fence they invent for themselves to keep at bay the implications of their professed faith than they would be by worldly prejudices and passions. "The truth shall make you free," the Gospel promises; but they cannot face this truth. They cannot let themselves be confronted by mystery, and so they have to invent beliefs to iron out mysteries as best they can, rather than bear the Christian agnosticism which is implied in the mystery of Christian faith.

This fear of beholding mystery, of self-questioning, of putting oneself at the cross-roads at which one may doubt one's own presuppositions, bodes ill for the Church. From the Christian point of view it is not surprising that apart from religion the plain man should exhibit this fear; but that it should be also and perhaps no less conspicuously found in the household of faith should not only surprise but very much disturb the Christian, as indeed it does when his faith is genuine and his acquaintance with the facts adequate. For if Christianity fails to eradicate this fear it is failing to exhibit satisfactorily the nature of its own faith in the God whose love "casteth out fear."[1]

The fear of doubt among those professing Christian faith can be due only to lack of that kind of faith of which doubt is an implicate. Were their faith lively, genuine, spontaneous, there would be no need for them to fear doubt, for their faith would enable them to face doubt with the assurance that it could in no wise injure their faith. It is the young man, full of life and physical vigour, who is least afraid to look upon physical death; fear of this increases with that bodily decrepitude which clings increasingly to an attenuated life. It is notorious that youth, because of its confidence in its own vigour, will face risks and challenges to itself from which age, more cautious, would shrink. When faith is vigorous it is no less unafraid. Nor does it seek to be encumbered with superstitions irrelevant to itself, or with idolatrous beliefs such as are common among churchy people of all denominations, not least those which, for reasons considered already in the the chapter on polarity, make the greatest show of being emancipated from idolatrous practices.

The modern world is very familiar with the phenomenon of the fear of doubt in the case of eschatological religions such as Racialism and Communism. No less than the late

[1] 1 *John* iv. 18.

National Socialist Party, modern Communism professes to be so sure that its ideology will win a speedy victory over the world that it seems remarkable that it should pay such extraordinary attention to expediting what is already so certain. The story is told that a Soviet professor of French, who in the course of a published treatise referred to "Vulgar Latin" had to write an explanatory footnote by way of apology for making use of an adjective which had acquired such an invidious, *bourgeois* significance. It is a story which becomes more credible when one considers the length to which the fear of doubt can lead men. This fear of doubt is present only where the religious or quasi-religious beliefs are in fact no more than artificially stimulated doctrinal propositions. Not only can the devotees readily help believing these; they need considerable encouragement or coercion to prevent them from disbelieving. The faith of many persons professing Christianity is no less artificial. There is no genuine certitude in it, nor does it bloom spontaneously. It must be hedged by fetishes to protect it from doubts which it could not withstand, for unlike genuine Christian faith it does not thrive on doubt. The artificially fabricated tenets which masquerade as beliefs may seem reasonable and natural enough, but only in the shelter of fetishes; one has to scratch but little below the surface to discover that they are as unreasonable as they are artificial. The more sectarian Christians are, the more they generally profess to know about the Christian mysteries; though they may not attempt to unravel them by official definition, they commonly try to surmount them with so much agility that one would think the Christian faith depended on their doing so. Chesterton, at one time disheartened by a Victorian optimism based on the notion that "we fit in to the world," came to perceive that "the Christian optimism is based on the fact that we do *not* fit in to the world";[1]

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1st edition, John Lane, 1909), p. 144.

similarly I would suggest that Christian faith is based on agnosticism. It is in considerable measure this profound agnosticism which makes it impervious to the attacks of its assailants who are so terrified of doubt that any able Christian apologist is generally able to show up their prefabricated beliefs as amusingly inconsistent. I quote Chesterton again:

> "I was much moved by the eloquent attack on Christianity as a thing of inhuman gloom; for I thought (and still think) sincere pessimism the unpardonable sin. Insincere pessimism is a social accomplishment, rather agreeable than otherwise; and fortunately nearly all pessimism is insincere. But if Christianity was, as these people said, a thing purely pessimistic and opposed to life, then I was quite prepared to blow up St Paul's Cathedral. But the extraordinary thing is this. They did prove to me in Chapter I (to my complete satisfaction) that Christianity was too pessimistic; and then, in Chapter II, they began to prove to me that it was a great deal too optimistic. . . . One rationalist had hardly done calling Christianity a nightmare before another began to call it a fool's paradise. . . . I rolled on my tongue with a terrible joy, as did all young men of that time, the taunts which Swinburne hurled at the dreariness of the creed—
>
> "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilæan, the world has grown gray with Thy breath."
>
> But when I read the same poet's accounts of paganism (as in 'Atalanta'), I gathered that the world was, if possible, more grey before the Galilæan breathed on it than afterwards. The poet maintained, indeed, in the abstract, that life itself was pitch dark. And yet, somehow, Christianity had darkened it.
>
> ". . . I felt that a strong case against Christianity lay in the charge that there is something timid, monkish, and unmanly about all that is called 'Christian,' especially in

its attitude towards resistance and fighting. The great sceptics of the nineteenth century were largely virile. . . . I turned to the next page in my agnostic manual, and my brain turned upside down. Now I found that I was to hate Christianity not for fighting too little, but for fighting too much. Christianity, it seemed, was the mother of wars.

"I take a third case. . . . The one real objection to the Christian religion is simply that it is one religion. The world is a big place. . . . Creeds, it was said, divided men; but at least morals united them. . . . But then I found an astonishing thing. I found that the very people who said that mankind was one church from Plato to Emerson were the very people who said that morality had changed altogether, and that what was right in one age was wrong in another.

". . . Or, again, certain phrases in the Epistles or the Marriage Service, were said by the anti-Christians to show a contempt for woman's intellect. But I found that the anti-Christians themselves had a contempt for woman's intellect; for it was their sneer at the Church on the Continent that 'only women' went to it. Or again, Christianity was reproached with its naked and hungry habits; with its sackcloth and dried peas. But the next minute Christianity was being reproached with its pomp and its ritualism; its shrines of porphyry and its robes of gold. . . . In the same conversation a free-thinker, a friend of mine, blamed Christianity for despising the Jews, and then despised it himself for being Jewish."[1]

My object in quoting so lengthily from Chesterton here is to illustrate how easy it is for a clever writer to poke fun at anti-Christian agnostics. The fun would be lost on the latter were there not a common ground between them and him, and it seems plain that agnosticism is this common

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (ed. cit.), pp. 154 ff.

ground. Chesterton is saying that his adversaries are not agnostic enough; far from accusing them of being too incredulous, he charges them with being insufficiently incredulous, that is, of being too credulous. They think they know for certain that women are superior or inferior to, or equal with men; they are certain that the military virtues are more honourable or more despicable than the pacific ones; they have no doubt that there is far more or far less truth in optimism than in pessimism. They have no doubt about these questions because they are afraid to doubt. But Christianity is not so readily credulous. It has no uniform witness about such matters; Rome, even, has made no pronouncement *de fide* upon them; it is not commonly appreciated about how much even the Roman Church is agnostic. Such questions belong not so much to Christian faith as to Christian doubt, or rather they pertain to that part of Christian faith which is its implicate, doubt. Only those unaccustomed to facing mysteries honestly are hardy enough to dogmatize about them in the non-Christian fashion. Genuine Christians are so much confronted by mystery that they never presume to dogmatize about it unless driven to this as an extreme measure, and then in such a way as to express their doubt rather than the faith which, do what they will, rises beyond it and yet is not so glibly expressible.

Unfortunately, too few, among those who profess Christianity, adequately appreciate the mystical character of their most genuine faith. The fear of doubt prevents them from perceiving that from this point of view the most clearly defined propositions of Christian orthodoxy are in fact propositions of doubt rather than of faith. They tell us more about the nature of Christian protest against the worldly who lack the Christian faith than they do about the nature of this faith among those who enjoy it. They are agnostic rather than dogmatic documents.

This is true even of the *Quicunque* or "Athanasian" Creed, so much maligned by many, for instance Mr Bernard Shaw, who says that in it "you affirm that certain things are so, and that anybody who doubts that they are so cannot be saved. And this is simply a piece of impudence on your part . . ."[1] Of course the *Quicunque* differs considerably from symbols such as the so-called Apostles' Creed, which have a liturgical origin, for it is ostensibly a compendium of forty theses specially designed to confute heretics. Nevertheless even the *Quicunque* is not nearly so dogmatic as it looks. Expressly compiled in protest against those who were deemed to be too facile in what they said about heavenly mysteries, it lodges its protest in a compendium described as "the Catholick faith: which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved." But one cannot believe in the co-equality of the Persons of the Trinity in the same way in which one may believe that the Marylebone Cricket Club was founded in 1788. In demanding that one believe the Persons of the Trinity to be co-equal and co-eternal, the *Quicunque* is saying something to this effect: "You might suppose, as some have done, that a way out of the mystery of the Trinity might be found by postulating the precedence or priority of one Person over another; but there is no such way out of the mystery. If with the heretics you fancy that you can dispose of mysteries in any such facile manner, you are guilty of trying to carry into Christian faith your old pagan presuppositions, and there is no hope of salvation for people who thus refuse to doubt such presuppositions."[2] It is no mere catalogue of dogmas to be affirmed under pain of damnation. Close scrutiny

[1] Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces* (Constable, 1934), *Parents and Children* (*Misalliance*), p. 71.

[2] Baron von Hügel reminds us (*The Reality of God* and *Religion and Agnosticism*, London, Dent, 1931, p. 182) that a seventh-century Christian Council condemned anyone who should deny the incomprehensibility of God. This is a typically Christian *anathema*.

reveals it to be above all a document of protest to guard a faith which, though figuratively "in" the symbol, is, needless to say, beyond the symbol, indeed beyond words, ineffable. The frequent *sed* and the recurring *et tamen* testify to that. The extent to which this widely ill-famed document is to be repudiated as a piece of intolerant dogmatism is therefore not so great as is often fancied.[1] Nobody would pretend that it was compiled in full view of all the considerations I am proposing, for our *problem* of doubt and faith is a modern one which was not fully before the mind of the generation that produced this symbol. But as we are not to suppose that the problems of polyphonous music were *wholly* outside the minds of musicians before the advent of the polyphonic period in music, so we should not fancy that the old confessions were as dogmatic in our sense as they appear to us to be. That they would be so for some minds is inevitable: I am here contending only that there were always Christians who, perceiving the ineffability of the faith they enjoyed, were not afraid of doubt, and that this spirit is not wholly absent from even the "Athanasian" Creed.

It may well be asked why, if this interpretation of credal symbols be valid, they are not put into a more negative form. In the *Quicunque* there are, as we have just seen, traces of the negative implicates of what is affirmed; but it is more typical of the historic creeds to have the appearance of simple dogmatic assertion, of anything else rather than doubt. To this I would answer that, paradoxical though it may appear at first sight, an explicitly negative confession, a simple protest against beliefs, would be likely to be the most dogmatic of all. This may be seen in the negative

[1] On this view, the "Athanasian" Creed is more than Lord Beaconsfield called it in *Endymion* (c. 54), "the most splendid ecclesiastical lyric ever poured forth by the genius of man," though of course it may be this too.

articles of the longer, non-liturgical confessions of faith such as the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, and very conspicuously in the Scottish *Confessio Negativa* of 1581, which, closing the door on mystery, consists chiefly of a catalogue of denials of doctrines generally associated with the Roman Church. It is not insignificant that in the course of the diatribe against "that Romane Antichrist" and "His erroneous and bloodie Decreets made at Trente, with all the Subscryvars and approvers of that cruell and bloodie Band conjured againis the Kirk of God," special mention is made of "His general and doutsum faith" (*generalem et ancipitem fidem*).[1] This Scottish document is plainly anything else rather than *anceps*; and from the point of view for which I am contending it would have been a more damaging criticism of Trent to say that this, though "doutsum," was not "doutsum" enough.

[1] *Scots Confession*, 1560 (Confessio Scoticana) and *Negative Confession*, 1581 (Confessio Negativa), published by the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1937), p. 107.

CHAPTER X

THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN DOUBT

WHILE it would be readily conceded by many that doubt as well as faith must have a place in Christianity as in all religion that is more than simple dogmatic superstition, the meaningfulness of the expression "Christian doubt" would be widely questioned. If might be said that though it is meaningful to talk of "Christian faith," inasmuch as there are not only certain tenets but a specific attitude of mind peculiar to Christians, contradistinguished from Muslims, Hindus and others, it is not meaningful to talk of "Christian doubt," since doubt is a philosophic attitude which applies to one religion in exactly the same way in which it applies to another, if indeed it applies at all. It may be true that it is one thing to believe that the Analects of Confucius are wholesome ethics, another that Georges Bernanos died in July 1948, and yet another that the Holy Ghost proceedeth from the Father and the Son; but to doubt any one of these propositions would seem to be much the same as to doubt any other.

Such a view arises from a confusion. It supposes that beliefs, particularly religious beliefs, commonly identified with religious faith, stand apart from a body of certain knowledge. The process of acquiring this knowledge is supposed to entail a measure of doubt, a shedding of prejudices and false beliefs, but once this shedding has taken place the way is open to a body of truth sharply distinguished from all kinds of belief. People who think in such a way naturally concede that beliefs should be tested at the bar of this infallible court, and that of two beliefs so brought to the bar, the winner should supersede the loser. This is a very

naïve view, since of course there is no such infallible court whither beliefs may be brought to trial. There is an intellectual experience which brings an intellectual conviction of intellectual cogency or intellectual certitude, as there are æsthetic and moral modes of experience which provide respectively æsthetic and moral convictions of æsthetic and moral certitude; but none of these modes of experience gives access to certainty about the *nature* of that which is experienced, even when there is what we call empirical evidence concerning the supposed object of our experience. Not only is there no body of certain knowledge to make accessible to me the nature of procession in the Trinity; I have no means of understanding with infallible certainty even the nature of matter. We have indeed no access to certainty at all, but only, at the best, to certitude concerning certainty, and this certitude arises from experience.

We have seen that such certitude about beliefs always implies doubt. As we are inevitably confronted with the question how we are to select our beliefs, so there emerges the question how we are to choose our doubts. For doubt is not a sort of salt from a common and independent source which we may add to a variety of dishes of belief with a view to improving their savour; rather has each belief its own proper doubt, as each dish has its own proper sauce without which one cannot hope to bring out its full flavour. It would be one thing to question my assertion that Georges Bernanos died in July 1948 on the ground that one had evidence that the great novelist died in June or August; it is a very different thing to question it on the ground which might be suggested by certain spiritualists, that death itself is an illusion, and that though the illusion may have occurred in July it is no less illusory for that. To each belief its own doubt; to each set of beliefs its own set of doubts. How then emerges the circle in which belief is vanquished by doubt, giving rise to another belief which in turn entails doubt,

and so forth? It is all very well to say that to the extent that it is meaningful to talk about Christian beliefs, the beliefs of Gladstone, and the beliefs of the London County Council, it is meaningful to talk about corresponding doubts. In such a cycle of doubt and belief,

> Veil after veil will lift—but there must be
> Veil upon veil behind.[1]

Since action is determined by belief we cannot say that it provides a test by which beliefs and doubts may be judged. But in the course of action we are confronted by persons, and we have seen that faith, which is to be distinguished from belief, is always personal. *Scio cui credidi*, says Christian faith: "I know whom I have believed."[2] If Christian faith emerges at all, it emerges in personal encounter with God. It is only to the extent that there is such personal encounter that it is possible to talk about Christian faith in such a way as to distinguish it from Christian belief considered as an instance of one of the beliefs to which we have been referring. When the plain man believes that he can see and understand certain things about which the philosopher is more agnostic, he is able so to believe chiefly because his faith in *himself* has not yet been shaken. It is not enough to shake our beliefs: that which must be shaken is our self-confidence which makes many of these beliefs possible. A small child does not entertain the kind of beliefs about his environment that the plain man calls natural; enjoying simple æsthetic experience he depends for his beliefs about how to arrange that experience on his father and others in whom he has confidence. But the question arises sooner or later: in whom is he to place his trust? His father may be an irresponsible fool, and it may become apparent to the growing child that most people think so. The placing of his confidence may be conditioned by many circumstances; he may find another person, a priest or teacher, perhaps, to take his father's

[1] Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*, Book 8. [2] 2 *Timothy* i. 12.

place; he may come to look to the community to provide the source of his beliefs; or he may develop that quality much prized by many, self-reliance. But both his doubts and his beliefs will largely depend on the direction of his trust. The philosopher is distinguished from other men not least by the extent to which he is ready to doubt evidences which would satisfy the less reflective members of the human race; but unless he is content to be no more than critical in his philosophy he must put some trust in someone, be it only himself, and the nature of his doubt will depend on the nature of his faith and whither this is directed.

The religious man claims to have encountered a Being in whom alone such trust may be placed without reserve. Christianity is explicit about some of the doubts which ensue from the discovery. Of nothing has the Christian greater certitude than that he has encountered God and found him to be worthy of incomparably greater trust than is anyone else, even oneself. Because he sets no limit on his faith in God, the Christian sets no limit on his lack of faith in all other beings; these are for him worthy of trust only to the extent that God is acting in them. This makes the genuine Christian more radically critical than anyone else of all beliefs, whether about God or the world or any other supposed object of experience, and in particular it makes him more radically self-critical than anybody else. Alone untouched by his scepticism is his experience of personal encounter with a Being whose claims on him he recognizes to be unlimited. There can be no question of his doubting the existence of this Being; it would be easier for him to doubt not only his own existence but even that of his own mother. To attempt to prove the existence of this Being would be in some sense, as Kierkegaard has suggested,[1] the most gratuitous insult he could offer, worse than

[1] See W. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 336. Dr. Lowrie is quoting the *Unscientific Postscript.*

trying to prove his own mother's existence under her own nose. Yet his encounter with God shakes his confidence in everyone other than God, and in particular himself. But it does more than this: it obliges him also to rearrange and restate his beliefs. These must always be less dogmatic than the beliefs of those who have not been confronted with a personal encounter with God, because the antinomy of doubt and belief which faith in God implies is vivified to the extent of the encounter.

The agnosticism of the Christian is therefore no less profound than are his beliefs. He is distinguished by his readiness to acknowledge mystery; in every situation he finds himself full of a reverence for such mystery, a reverence quite alien from both the most credulous and the most sceptical of men who have not encountered God. It is an ill omen for much contemporary Christianity and a sign of its hollowness, that the specifically Christian spirit of reverence for mystery is almost unknown to it. Craving "clearer" definition of beliefs, or else athirst to diminish the number of tenets to be believed, such bogus religion proclaims its own lack of personal encounter with God. There is probably nothing more characteristic of the genuine Christian than his readiness to behold mystery, to be on the *qui vive* for it, to turn every corner in life as though he expected to meet it. He is thus neither less a believer nor less a doubter than the ordinary ruck of mankind; rather is he at once far more credulous and far more sceptical, in the sense that he is both more capable of questioning beliefs and more capable of believing. On the one hand he is as reluctant to define his beliefs as is a timid schoolboy to take his bath on a frosty morning, and yet on the other hand no one is more ready than he to do so when life demands it as it incessantly does. Happiest when simply contemplating the wonder and mystery made known to him in his personal encounter with God, he is not afraid to face the demands that

this makes both on his will to believe and on his will to doubt. And though, growing in grace, as the theologians say, and finding that his faith is thereby strengthened, he may speak of enjoying deeper trust in God, this does nothing to diminish his problem of doubt and belief: on the contrary, as his faith increases, so also, *pari passu*, do his beliefs and doubts. He must become increasingly conscious, however, that neither his beliefs nor his doubts are adequate. He believes, but not enough; he is agnostic, but not agnostic enough.

It is therefore not surprising that Christians differ immensely among themselves in regard to beliefs. That they do differ is notorious enough to be almost a platitude; yet the extent and profundity of their differences is often understated, as though these could be diminished by a sort of pious litotes. Most Christians agree that this is not as it should be, that it is due to sin, that it is not in accordance with the will of God, and so forth; nevertheless they cannot even agree about the nature of sin or about precisely how the will of God expresses itself. Since the extent of the disagreement is much greater and the situation much more complex than is commonly supposed, it will be necessary to consider the disagreement to some extent before suggesting a remedy which might be more profitable than the credal compromises that have shown themselves to be profitless indeed. Here, especially, we can ill afford to neglect one of the most characteristically Christian observations of the great French preacher, Bossuet: *nous ne connaissons le tout de rien.* Christians need not be dismayed by Christian misunderstanding of the revelation of God in Christ. They should be thankful, since misunderstanding, Professor Ryle reminds us, implies also understanding.[1]

[1] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London, Hutchinson, 1947), p. 60.

CHAPTER XI

THE DISUNITY OF CHRISTENDOM

It has for long been a matter of dispute in modern œcumenical conferences whether the Christian society is essentially congregational, episcopal, presbyterian or otherwise. The millions who, taking only a passing interest in such deliberations, treat the question empirically, have little doubt about it: it is anarchical. But the extent of the empirical evidence for this latter view is not at all fully appreciated. That there are many sects, calling themselves Churches, Groups, Armies, Brethren, Disciples, Assemblies, Societies, or Branches of the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, according to their respective polities, is well enough known. Nor does it pass unnoticed that these bodies have for the most part as little to do with one another as the households of a London suburb; that is, there appear to be among them relations of friendship here and there, tendencies very eagerly to seek the company of some and to eschew that of others, mass-meetings sometimes when a common interest is at stake, and even an occasional marriage, not always a love-match nor always attended by domestic concord. Even apart from these alliances, domestic concord is not, it would seem, very characteristic of the monads which together make up the anarchy. Though there is nowadays little external evidence of internecine strife, little bloodshed, the impression generally given is that this *laissez-vivre* is to be accounted for in no inconsiderable measure by the fact that a secular or half-secular community protects Christian sects from each other by means of wise legislation. Above all the atmosphere is pervaded by a superficial courtesy which it takes a socially outrageous *faux pas* to

break down. Such is the impression that modern Christendom generally makes on the modern world, and it cannot be said to be a wholly false one.

The situation in the United States of America is, though striking, fundamentally by no means untypical of the rest of Christendom as this confronts the ordinary observer outside the immediate influence of organized Christianity. The entire population of the United States adhering to organized religion is estimated at about 67 millions.[1] This population is divided among 256 religious denominations nearly all of which profess Christianity. One of these, the Roman Church, accounts for 23 millions. In the remaining 255 denominations, 42 millions of the population are divided among 51 of the larger non-Roman bodies, while the remaining 2 millions are spread among the 204 smaller sects. Numerically, the nearest single denomination to the Roman Church is the chief Methodist body,[2] which claims little more than a quarter of the numbers adhering to Rome, 6½ millions; but the largest denominational *group*, the Baptist, comprising nineteen denominations, claims the allegiance of 11½ millions, about half the Roman Catholic population. Among the smaller bodies enjoying full legal protection may be mentioned the Pentecostal Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, the Church of the Living God and Pillar and Ground of Truth, the National David Spiritual Temple of Christ Church Union, Christ's Sanctified Holy Church Colored, the Church of Daniel's Band, and the Apostolic Holy Church of God. As an example of sectarian fertility in America the Dean of the Harvard Divinity School cites the Mennonite body which, entering America in colonial

[1] For this and other statistical information in the present chapter, I am indebted to a useful handbook by the Dean of the Harvard Divinity School, W. L. Sperry, *Religion in America* (Cambridge University Press, 1945), and to the *Yearbook of American Churches*, edited under the ægis of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America.

[2] This is composed of Methodist bodies which united in 1939.

times with a background of German Pietism, now consists of a family of eighteen sects which together account for only about 100,000 of the population.[1] But it seems that ecclesiastical reconciliations come almost as easily as schisms: in 1926, for instance, the Mount Moriah Fire Baptized Holiness Church of Knoxville, Tennessee, appears to have been reconciled to the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God in the Americas, which had been organized in South Carolina in 1898.[2] The entire Protestant Episcopal Church claims only 2 millions, somewhat less than a thirtieth of the 67 millions normally adhering to some form of organized religion; but since the figures include children in the families of adult church members, and since only about half of even the latter manifest their allegiance to the bodies to which they belong (except in the case of the Roman Church), it is hardly likely that in the continental United States more than one person in two hundred may be described as manifesting adult allegiance to the Episcopal Church.[3] Much the same may be said of Presbyterians, though in addition to the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, whose numbers are about the same as those of the Episcopal Church, there are other Presbyterian denominations, notably the Presbyterian Church in the United States. This Southern body, not to be confused with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, claims about half a million people.

One of the concomitants of this anarchy is widespread sectarian education. There are 244 colleges or universities in the United States which, organized in the nineteenth century and recognized by national and regional "accrediting associations," are under strictly denominational control. This figure does not include the large number of the institu-

[1] W. L. Sperry, *Religion in America*, p. 76. [2] *Idem*, p. 72.

[3] The population of the continental United States is estimated at 134,000,000. In 1920 it was nearly 106,000,000; in 1930, 123,000,000.

tions which are Congregational in origin or historical connection, for it is apparently contrary to the polity of American Congregationalism to allow itself official control of even the colleges most strongly under its influence.

Yet such figures give little notion of the extent of Christian disunity in America.[1] The vast majority of American Protestants have not only practically no sense of the sin of schism; they can conceive only with much difficulty the tie binding their particular local fane to their particular denomination. The average American Protestant not only thinks it of little account that a Christian denomination should divide; he is not readily shocked by a Christian changing his denomination as casually as he would change his tennis-club. The advertisement which recently appeared in a British newspaper,[2] "Young man, age 35, free to preach, teach, anywhere, any denomination, second fortnight August," would elicit from him scarcely even the mild reaction that might perhaps still be manifested by his British counterpart.

But on this other side of the Atlantic we are confronted with a situation which, though somewhat different in aspect, is certainly no less unsatisfactory. Here there is evidence of greater uneasiness among responsible people in most denominations, each of which presents its own picture of the facts, coloured by private dogmatic principles and in many cases also with private hopes and notions about what the situation ought to be. A perusal of the *Documents on Christian Unity*[3] will show that even when saying that they desire Christian unity, the denominations do not all

[1] For a description of the more curious early mid-nineteenth century sects in America, see Ray Strachey, *Religious Fanaticism* (Faber & Gwyer, 1928).

[2] *Glasgow Herald*, 18th June 1948.

[3] These are edited by the Bishop of Chichester, Dr G. K. A. Bell, in three series, 1924, 1930 and 1948, respectively, and published by the Oxford University Press.

mean the same thing. It is evident, for instance, that many delegates to œcumenical conferences would be overjoyed at the prospect of a widespread union even if this meant still further alienation from, say, the Roman Church, which apart from other considerations represents numerically half of modern Christendom. They speak as though patching together half or a quarter of a broken vessel would be a notable achievement even if it involved making the remaining larger pieces more difficult to put together than were even the original fragments. Nor is there any widespread agreement about how the vessel is broken; whether indeed it is broken at all.

When we investigate the vast bibliography on Christian Reunion[1] we are at once impressed by the immense disunity on this subject even within the individual bodies themselves. This is naturally conspicuous in Communions such as the Anglican, which, however wrongly, tend to give the impression to those outside them of being nothing other than anarchies. The validity of such a judgment depends of course in no small measure on extremely complex dogmatic questions; for instance, the relative importance of (*a*) questions about Order and (*b*) other dogmatic questions; but the fact remains that no genuine dogmatic agreement exists in any Christian Communion. It does not exist even within the Roman Church to the extent that is commonly supposed. In the more extreme Protestant circles there appears to be considerable dogmatic agreement that the Roman Church is to be hated; yet there is evidently no such agreement about the nature of the hatred or the form that it should take. It happens occasionally that two Communions recognize each other's Orders as valid without this recognition having much effect in making their relationship

[1] There is an annotated bibliography of 1,181 books and periodicals: H. R. T. Brandreth, *Unity and Reunion* (London, A. & C. Black, 1945).

more friendly: it is as though one said, "That I recognize your birth to be not illegitimate is not an adequate reason for my wishing to associate with you." On the other hand it happens no less frequently that two Communions, not recognizing each other's Orders in this way, nevertheless profess the most cordial friendship: this is almost like saying, "That we are dear friends, closer than brothers, does not make you any less a bastard." When there is a minor reunion such as that of the Established Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland in 1929, there is a strong tendency for it to be achieved at a price neither party has the right to pay: agreeing to believe a little less than they did before, the parties also doubt less and are less impressed by the mystery of Christian Faith.

Side by side with such remarkable lack of agreement on the part of the *avant garde* of œcumenically minded persons is the hardly less remarkable lack of interest in œcumenical movements on the part of the generality of the now small section of the population of Great Britain, for example, which cannot yet be described as mainly secular in outlook. This minority adhering to organized religion persistently refuses to face the fact that it is a minority. To the extent that it tries to believe as many sectarian tenets as possible, it upbraids both the world and that part of Christendom outside its own denomination for unwillingness to believe so many doctrinal propositions; to the extent that it tries to believe as few as possible it is perplexed at the reluctance of fellow-Christians to recognize whatever it happens to consider the "fundamental propositions." The impression given is that Christians are addicted to the use of what Mr Bertrand Russell has wittily called the irregular verb, "I am firm; you are obstinate; he is a pig-headed fool," and that this often takes the form, "I am tolerant; you are lax; he is a badly disguised pagan." The ignorance of the majority of Christians of most denominations concerning historical

facts relating to dogmas is notorious. An intelligent Presbyterian woman of the upper-middle class asked me, "Who or what is or was the Holy Ghost?" (*ipsissima verba*), which question I parried, in order better to appreciate her real difficulty, by asking her who or what she supposed He or It was or had been. To this she immediately replied that she understood it to have been the Third Person of the Trinity, replacing at the time of the Reformation the Virgin Mary who had till then occupied that position. Such ignorance is much less exceptional than is commonly supposed in some ecclesiastical and academic circles, and modern œcumenical conferences would be less unrealistic if they took better into account such empirical facts; these are by no means negligible.

Were there even agreement about what would constitute Christian unity, it might be improper to write as I have done about Christian disunity. But there are probably more distinguishable theological positions about this than there are distinguishable denominations. One of the most obvious examples of such divergence is the readiness with which certain Christians would welcome the reunion of "the Churches," which, say others who hold that to be an unbiblical expression, do not exist, since there can be but one Church. Nor is there lacking profound disagreement on important questions among distinguished members of the same Communion. For instance, Professor D. M. Mackinnon and Mr Middleton Murry would both be glad, I presume, to be called Anglicans; yet at the Malvern Conference the former professed himself to be "theologically . . . poles apart from" the latter.[1] It may very well be in some ways desirable and perhaps even conducive to greater interdenominational friendship that such disagreements should exist, and it is certainly right that they should be voiced; but that they raise a very difficult problem is indis-

[1] *Malvern*, 1941 (London, Longmans, 1941), p. 98.

putable. At a meeting of a committee on the control of atomic energy there may be violent disagreement on questions of the most urgent practical importance; but there is at any rate agreement on what atomic energy is. It would seem that in modern œcumenical and even denominational conferences there is not even complete agreement comparable to that. Yet the significant fact is that whereas a committee on the control of atomic energy which did not agree to that extent would hardly come into existence at all, Christian conferences which appear to be in such a position certainly do. It remains to be seen, however, of what this fact is significant.

From no point of view which any modern theological school of thought would call Catholic could one be said to be a Christian who did not accept the doctrine of an incarnate Godhead. Nevertheless at œcumenical councils such as we have been considering there are some members at any rate who represent denominations a very large number of the adherents of which may be called Christians only in the sense that they love and admire Jesus; that is to say, they are "Christophils" in the sense in which I, being a lover and admirer of France, may be called a Francophil. From the point of view of the "Catholics" they can hardly be within the œcumenical council at all. By the very act of denying, say, the divinity of Christ, in the sense in which this is understood by other members of the council who hold this to be essential doctrine, they cease to be in fact members of an œcumenical council. But this is somewhat like saying that the Pope cannot be a heretic, since a Pope who became guilty of heresy would thereby immediately cease to be Pope. As Alfonso de Castro, confessor to the Spanish King Philip II, pointed out four centuries ago,

[1] Not, by the way, five, as the learned historian and Protestant apologist G. G. Coulton, surprisingly says on p. 228 of *Papal Infallibility* (London: The Faith Press, 1932). Philip II was not born till 1527.

such an argument means no more than saying that none of the faithful could be a heretic since by uttering heresy he would cease to be one of the faithful. Moreover, from the point of view of the Vatican, and presumably also from that of the Orthodox Church, œcumenical conferences such as the one at Amsterdam in 1948 are composed exclusively of persons each of whom is in the circumstances *ipso facto* disqualified from being a member of an œcumenical conference. There are furthermore many eminent members of the Roman Church to whom such a view is repugnant, while, on the other hand, such is the obsession against Rome on the part of many extreme Protestants that one cannot but suppose that they would regard as spurious any conference purporting to be Christian which comprised a single member willing to apply the term Christian to a member of the Roman Church. How can one promote Christian unity if even the word "Christian" has no uniform meaning?

These considerations serve to indicate very broadly something of the chaos underlying endeavours to achieve Christian unity on a dogmatic basis. One might probe the chaos more extensively; but I hope that, without fully analysing a situation which it would take a book of possibly a thousand pages or more so to analyse, I have been able to show that such a fuller examination could but confirm the view that Christian unity on a dogmatic basis is not likely to be attained. The frequently expressed opinion that though no important practical result has attended such conferences, and though they have achieved no very far-reaching dogmatic agreement even among the constituent denominations (not even that the term "denomination" be applied to all of them !), they may nevertheless be of great value in making the delegates more "œcumenically minded," generally means little more than the platitude that it would be a good thing for the clergy to be better

educated or to travel more. That it is desirable for people of different traditions to meet one another will be denied only by obscurantists; but it can hardly be said to be the function of an œcumenical council on Christian unity to provide a *ballon d'essai* by which to ascertain whether any good may come out of a convention of dogmatic chaos. It is, however, indisputable that it is highly educative for a narrow minded person to expound his dogmatic narrowness in the company of other persons similarly engaged in expounding their respective narrowmindednesses, provided that all have faith (contradistinguished from belief in dogmatic propositions) in the same Person. Such faith may be said to be a common faith sufficient for the purpose in question, though some be gravely mistaken about the nature of the Person or of the personal relationship between him and them; even, indeed, when some consider him to be a divine Saviour though in fact he be instead a human moral Teacher, or when some think him one of the few prophets of human history with a spark of divinity in him though he be in fact Very God made Man, only-begotten Son of the Father, crucified, risen, reigning, and present in his Church, "lo . . . alway, even unto the end of the world."[1]

Such an assembly may be highly educative; but educative to what end? It cannot be for a dogmatic end, that is, to get greater concurrence about the propositions to be believed; for this would require a dogmatic basis which, we have seen, is conspicuously absent from the gatherings we have in mind, whose members cannot agree even about the nature of the truth of the few dogmatic propositions in which they might possibly concur. Despairing the possibility of achieving Christian unity in these circumstances on a dogmatic basis, many have been led to consider whether they might not more profitably seek instead unity on the

[1] *St Matthew* xxviii. 20.

basis of common action. That is to say, they are interested in the possibility of gatherings in which Christians, setting aside for the moment their dogmatic differences, might agree nevertheless to act together in a particular existential situation. They might agree, for instance, it is suggested, in resisting an attempt by a powerful atheistic State to diminish the freedom of Christians throughout the world to build places of worship or proclaim the Gospel, or an effort by a local town council to allow bars and cinemas to open at an hour on Sunday during which Christian denominations in the district are in the habit of providing religious services.

Advocates of this form of strategy tend to forget that belief in it is equivalent to a dogmatic proposition concerning it. Even belief in the psychological possibility of a man temporarily setting aside a metaphysical or religious dogma as if it were his father's gold watch, is itself a highly contentious dogma. Such "common action" is common action only if certain metaphysical affirmations be accepted, and such acceptance is plainly lacking. It may be practically expedient, as a military alliance may be expedient in politics; but it no more achieves a measure of Christian unity than such an alliance achieves political unity. This is often what certain Christian observers have in mind when exasperation leads them to say, somewhat brutally, that many modern œcumenical conferences are "political" rather than Christian.

The attitude of the Vatican to modern œcumenical gatherings such as we have been considering in this chapter is well known though by no means always well understood. In 1893, thirty-five years before the famous Encyclical of Pius XI, *Mortalium animos*, a World's Parliament of Religions, to which delegates from all religions in the world were invited, was opened in Chicago by Cardinal Gibbons, who recited the Lord's Prayer; yet but two years

later Leo XIII, in a letter to the Apostolic Delegate in the United States (later Cardinal Satolli), discountenanced participation by Roman Catholics in such gatherings.[1] While the attitude of the Vatican towards a society for the union of Christendom, formed in London in 1857, was against participation, Benedict XV in 1916 pontifically approved the "Church Unity Octave" (January 18–25) and even endowed with indulgences certain prayers for the "true unity" of Christendom.[2] The "Malines Conversations," in which Lord Halifax and Cardinal Mercier participated, were discontinued in 1926, five years after they had been begun.

I am not concerned here either to defend or attack the Roman attitude on conferences aiming at the union of Christendom, which not unnaturally arouses hostility even among some of those who, though outside the Roman communion, are inclined to be sympathetic towards Rome. Still more vexatious are the findings of the Vatican Council in 1870. But it cannot be denied that Rome's outlook on this question, whether right or wrong, seems to be very much more realistic than that of most of the rest of Christendom. For even if we say categorically, without further ado, that Rome is wrong, that she is not the sole repository of living Christian truth, that she is not the living, undivided Body of Christ, we cannot deny that she has at any rate grasped incomparably better than most other Communions the nature of the situation. This view has, of course, nothing to do with the truth or falsity of Rome's claims: it would be a conclusion no less inescapable even if the Pope were "Anti-Christ."[3] Many Protestants fail also to perceive that in taking this attitude Rome is much more

[1] *Acta Leonis XIII*, vol. xv., p. 323.

[2] Brief of 25 February, 1916; *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis*, 9–61.

[3] It will be remembered that this is the teaching of the Scottish *Confessio Negativa*; *supra*, p. 93.

complimentary to their honesty than they are to one another in attempting unity on a dogmatic basis in œcumenical conferences of the kind we have considered. For the more readily we grant the integrity of all those who, professing faith in Christ, find themselves in dogmatic disagreement that could hardly be more far-reaching or profound (and Christian charity compels us to grant this wherever it is in the least possible so to do), the more we are obliged to admit that union of Christendom is not to be attained in such œcumenical conferences without a radical change in the whole structure of Christian thought. And if unity on such a basis has become chimerical, unity on the basis of action is the shadow of a chimera.

Yet when all this is said, there remains the fact of faith in Christ, which inspires the longing "that they all may be one."[1] Remembering that doubt is an implicate of faith, let us examine the possibility that in this implicate may be found a more secure, fruitful and profitable basis for genuine Christian unity.

[1] *St John* xvii. 21.

CHAPTER XII

DOUBT AS A BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN RECONCILIATION

It is notorious that both historically and in the contemporary situation one of the main stumbling-blocks to organic unity is doctrinal difference concerning the sacrament instituted by Christ at the Supper on the eve of his crucifixion. Yet is is improbable that any Christian denomination would refuse to give assent to the doctrinal proposition, "I believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is present in the Sacrament of Communion." To this even the few bodies such as the Salvation Army and the Society of Friends, which have no place in their worship for the eucharist, would hardly be exceptions. It is nevertheless true that the widely appreciated possibility of agreement on such a proposition has never practically contributed towards organic Christian unity to any noteworthy extent. The reason for this is plain: the word "present" is so ambiguous that for practical purposes it may be said to mean almost anything at all. The verbal agreement among Christians which might easily be reached about the proposition would be hardly less insignificant than the agreement among exponents of opposing political ideologies to assent to the proposition, "I believe that the aim of government should be the welfare of humanity."

This is not nearly well enough appreciated by some of the delegates to modern œcumenical conferences. In a report from the World Assembly at Amsterdam in 1948, we find the view expressed that much disunity is due to no more than "difference of emphasis"; but the report goes on to admit that, when all that is said, "there remains a hard core of disagreement between different total ways of apprehending

the Church of Christ. Each of these views sees every part of the Church's life in the setting of the whole, so that even where the parts seem to be similar they are set in a context which, as yet, we find irreconcilable with the whole context of the other. As so often in the past, we have not been able to present to each other the *wholeness* of our belief in ways that are mutually acceptable."[1] This appears to me to be a misleading account of the situation. Agreement about the whole is unattainable because there is no genuine agreement about the individual propositions: the illusion of concord about many of these is dispelled when, in a larger context, their meaning is brought to light. Were more attention paid to the meaning of terms on which some agreement is supposed to have been reached, it would be seen that the difficulty is as real in respect of the individual propositions as it is in regard to the whole. The agreement is sometimes no more than verbal.

Where attempts at dogmatic concord break down, recourse is had to a reiteration of the profession of love for Christ as Lord and Saviour which all make; but this does not necessarily bring denominations closer to one another. That two brothers should each assent to the proposition, "I love my father" is no guarantee that their fraternal relationship will be good. A girl may enjoy the very sincere love of both her father and her suitor; but far from being a probable basis of concord between the two men, this circumstance is not unlikely to result in their kicking each other. While it is true that Christian love ought to be purer and more comprehensive, more *agape* and less *eros*, its purity in the Church Militant is in fact insufficient to make it an adequate basis for that kind of Christian reconciliation which may lead to organic unity. Only an intellectual

[1] Yet a book published under the auspices of the World Council of Churches is provocatively entitled, *The Church and the Disorder of Society* (London, S.C.M., 1948).

basis is safe, and we have seen how little is the hope of finding such a basis in dogmatic propositions.

Doubt would, however, provide a basis not only intellectually sound but likely to have interesting practical results. The practical efficacy of doubt as a mediating ground is enhanced by the reluctance of the world to doubt its own presuppositions. By expressing the doubt implicit in their faith, Christians tend to bring themselves much closer to each other and present a united front to the world to an extent not attainable by other means. For all Christians question many propositions and philosophical theories which the world tends to accept as indubitable or even unconsciously to assume. Such is the psychological effect of the wonder in the heart of the genuine Christian at the mystery of his experience (the impact of divine love, for example), that nothing capable of being expressed in a propositional form can be held by him to be, strictly speaking, indubitable. And yet, as he doubts, his Christian faith rises like a descant above doubt, somehow independent of the latter, yet implying it. A willingness to doubt, far from entailing doctrinal compromise, provides the soil in which such faith as may be divinely vouchsafed will take root and live. Such open-mindedness is often mistaken for timidity or a weak acquiescence in the compromise of a *via media*. This is a vulgar error which the Report of the Anglican Commission on Christian Doctrine appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922 did well to repudiate.[1] In rejecting the view that reluctance to define precisely the nature of the eucharistic Presence indicates acceptance of a "middle" theory, the Report appositely quoted Elizabeth's famous rhyme:

> 'Twas God the word that spake it,
> He took the bread and brake it;
> And what the word did make it,
> That I believe and take it.

[1] *Doctrine in the Church of England* (London, S.P.C.K., 1938), p. 170 f.

For were this a statement of a *via media* it would have been very much better expressed otherwise. Its significance lies in the fact that it expresses that doubt which is a safeguard, rather, against such an unhappy and dishonest compromise. Not only could the most extreme parties to the doctrinal dispute which gave rise to it utter it with a good conscience, but to the extent that the doubt enshrined in it was genuine it would purify and vivify their respective beliefs, not undermine these. Anglicanism is a compromise only in the measure that in such controversies its doubts are superficial or insincere; to the extent that they are honest and profound the vitality and true unity of Anglicanism are enhanced. This happens wherever faith is so tried in the fire of genuine doubt, and it is on such lines that we may look for a Christian reconciliation that will not injure Christian faith, but on the contrary fortify it.

It would perhaps be even easier to achieve verbal agreement among Christians to certain cautiously framed propositions concerning the Bible as a norm of that kind of knowledge claimed to be peculiar to Christianity. That the Bible, being a channel of divine revelation, is worthy of profound reverence as such, would be admitted by Mormons and Christian Scientists as well as by Methodists and Roman Catholics. All denominations do in fact turn to scriptural documents to support their claims. But on analysis it is quickly discoverable that such seeming agreement, having little common epistemological foundation, has no practical efficacy as a basis for Christian reconciliation. There are still some who would adduce scriptural "proofs" in the old-fashioned Protestant manner; but though this practice would be widely regarded as bibliolatrous, it would be very difficult to get any genuine agreement on what bibliolatry is. In the introduction to a thoughtful study on theories of the Bible, Professor Paterson wrote:[1]

[1] W. P. Paterson, *The Rule of Faith* (4th edition, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), p. 12.

> "It is superficially plausible to say that Roman Catholicism and Protestantism differ in their conception of the doctrinal content of Christianity because they operate with different conceptions of the source and norm of doctrine, but in reality they have put a different interpretation upon essential features of the Christian religion. The prior and governing fact was a conviction that the system of divine and saving truth had been found, understood and applied; and the theory that was adopted as to the repository and test of truth was that which best supported and justified the conception that had been formed of the essential nature and content of Christianity."

In a more recent critical examination of the subject, considered with reference to the epistemological views of Aquinas and the twentieth-century Protestant theologian Karl Barth, respectively, Mr Alan Fairweather is very sensible of such difficulties.[1] These arise as soon as appeal to Scripture is made. Beliefs precede the appeal, and whatever be the theory about Scripture, the Bible is in fact always subject to interpretation in the light of the dogmatic presuppositions to support which it is called to testify. Literary exegesis is indispensable wherever words are used, and the Bible is, of course, no exception; but Biblical exegesis does little towards bringing doctrinally opposed Christians nearer to one another.

Unless the importance of doubt as an implicate of faith be fully appreciated, the results of such exegesis, whatever be the level of scholarship, will always be treated as though they provided a fresh obstacle to be surmounted by one side or the other, rather than an instrument by which both sides may be led to deeper self-questioning. At random I quote an example from a Salvationist catechism cited by Professor Curtis.[2] In reply to the question "Is the employ-

[1] A. M. Fairweather, *The Word as Truth* (London, Lutterworth, 1944).

[2] W. A. Curtis, *A History of Creeds and Confessions of Faith* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1911), p. 344.

ment of women to preach contrary to the express teaching of Scripture?" the answer offered is: "*Most decidedly not.* It is true that there is one solitary passage in Paul's writings which at first seems to favour such prohibition, namely, 1 Cor. xiv. 34–35.[1] But, rightly understood, this passage simply means that he, the Apostle, thought it a shame for a woman to take part in the debates which were common in Jewish assemblies at that time. . . ." The Bible is in fact approached thus by many Christians, not least by those Protestants who in America are still called "fundamentalists."[2] It is inaccurate to speak of the interpretation of Scripture by an infallible authority such as the Church, or the Pope speaking *ex cathedra*, as though this were a proceeding peculiar to Rome. To the extent that Christians fail to recognize the place of doubt as an implicate of faith, all Biblical interpretation, Roman, Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican or otherwise, is held to be infallible. Dogma need not purport to be infallible;[3] but only in the light of Christian doubt can the Christian significance of fallibility be appreciated. Protestantism has to learn this no less than Rome.

"Notwithstanding the difference in doctrine among us," runs a statement which Professor Paterson says was adopted "almost without discussion" by the World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne in 1927,[4] "we are united in a common Christian Faith, which is proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures. . . ." But there could be no need for such a statement to be discussed, so far as a theory of Scripture is

[1] "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak. . . ."

[2] "Fundamentalism" is an American word. It is applied to the maintenance of certain beliefs, among which is the doctrine that the Bible, being "inerrant," is to be accepted "literally" as a "fundamental" of Protestant Christianity.

[3] "Dogma" (δοκή, δόκημα) means rather, etymologically, a vision or an opinion. δοκῶ μοι = methinks.

[4] W. P. Paterson, *The Rule of Faith*, p. 412.

concerned, since it is irrelevant to the problem of finding such a theory. It says no more about the Bible than that this, like the Lausanne Conference, proclaims Christian Faith—a proposition to which an atheist would be as likely to assent as would a Christian. Nor would Lausanne be today so readily called, as it was by Professor Paterson, "an irenical triumph."[1] Many earnest observers of the events of the last twenty years would be inclined to call the Lausanne triumph ironical rather than irenical.

Even those most prone to look with facile optimism on the prospects of Christian reconciliation admit that the organic unity of all Christendom is a vision the fulfilment of which looks no nearer, and possibly further away, than it looked a century ago. Many of that class of Protestants who, though insisting that Rome is guilty of the gravest errors, would not deny to Roman Catholics the name of Christian and would find them, therefore, essential to the organic unity of Christendom, blame the Vatican's policy for the failure. It is hard to see how such a view can be seriously maintained, since the prospect of organic unity would be scarcely less dim even if the entire Roman Communion were to be obliterated from the face of the earth. Still more frivolous is the suggestion that a pointer to the solution of the problem has been discovered in the Mission field and in the "younger Churches." There, it is said, the disunity of Christendom is sometimes much less acutely felt than in the older countries. It need hardly be said that one can take this naïve view only by ignoring the consideration that the absence of the problem in a particular Christian society does not necessarily mean that it has been overcome, since it may not have arisen. Nor does such an absence necessarily indicate immunity from the afflictions which have beset Christendom. It may betoken, rather, only that kind of health or vigour that springs from immaturity or isolation:

[1] W. P. Paterson, *The Rule of Faith*, p. 413.

it is well known in the medical world that a healthy young man from the country fares worse on contact with colds and other infections from which his city cousin has acquired some immunity, than does the latter. Moreover it may be asked whether such a situation betokens health or vigour at all: a senile society might be as untroubled by disunity as a juvenile one. It may be that in some cases the semblance of unity is procured by the dilution of dogma rather than by genuine doubt. From the point of view of some Christians, union in South India, for instance, was purchased at an exorbitant price that no one had the right to pay, higher than that which Rome has had to pay for her internal unity. At any rate, Christian doubt asks no such price, and though it does not pretend to be a basis for organic Christian unity, but only for Christian reconciliation, its significance for this is worthy of scrutiny.

It is the urgent and inescapable duty of all who profess adherence to Christ to pray for and in every way to seek Christian reconciliation, that is, such concord as would make the way towards organic unity more open. Nothing is more foolish than to suppose that this reconciliation can be accomplished by giving up beliefs or watering them down. The way lies in believing not less but more deeply and vigorously, for the more vigorous and profound our beliefs the richer their implicates of doubt. In pleading for more doubt I am in fact but pleading for the Gospel injunction, "Be not afraid, only believe."[1] It should not be forgotten that there is far more genuine understanding and fellowship between two very profound believers of widely disparate traditions (say, an Anglo-Catholic and a Congregationalist, or a Quaker and a Roman Catholic) than there is between two people whose beliefs, being shallow and half-hearted, are little more than presuppositions. The profound believers have a common ground in the experience of doubt, not

[1] *Mark* v. 36; cf. *Luke* viii. 50.

least doubt about worldly presuppositions to which shallower Christians still cling.

I would suggest then that it would be profitable for Christians to make it their œcumenical starting-point to discover which worldly presuppositions are universally doubted by Christians. Do all prefer agnosticism about the possibility of miracles, for example, to the common worldly presuppositions against them, or are there some who profess Christianity to the extent of having Christian reconciliation on their conscience who would rather share the world's prejudices here? One still hears of storms of controversy being raised in certain circles over questions such as the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. This and other such doctrines have been the subject of newspaper correspondence in which protagonists of rival views, usually labelled "orthodox" and "modernist" respectively, have engaged in diatribes against each other because the one refused to assent to the other's doctrinal propositions. But the important question *in the first instance* is not whether Jesus was born of a Virgin or was not, but whether one is prepared to admit the possibility of mystery here. I may consider the "orthodox" or the "modernist" view to be mistaken; but I should be unwilling to deny the designation "Christian" to one, whatever his view, who found himself here truly in the presence of mystery. Conversely, I should have as little sympathy with a person who said that there was no mystery, since the Church or Bible or Inner Light had declared that Jesus was born of a Virgin, as I should have for one who said there was no mystery because such parthenogenesis is indubitably fabulous, and in any case a notion less important than that we should be kind to dumb animals, and so forth. I am as suspicious of fanatics who want to try to believe in the Incarnation or Resurrection without mystery as I am of people who think they can "put Christianity into practice" or "imitate Christ" or "be kind to

people," as though these were problems in engineering, involving no sense of mystery, wonder or doubt. People who affect to be kind to me when they have no sense of the mystery of human kindness generally remind me of love-making with a hatchet. People who propose to imitate Christ as jauntily as though he were their school prefect usually mean only to give a token of the ferocity of their insistence on the dogmatic proposition that Christ is not God, and that there is consequently nothing comical about the notion that any biped mammal should casually propose to imitate him. People who talk about putting Christianity into practice without first considering either what it is or whether it is true almost always mean to affirm an equation of Christianity with the sum of the speaker's prejudices. But those who profess to swallow doctrines like the Incarnation and Resurrection as though they were as digestible as water mean no more by them than the *parvenue* meant by the Virgin Birth when she, being rebuked for her social snobbery by a reminder that Jesus was only a carpenter, unhesitatingly pointed out that he nevertheless came from a very good family on his mother's side. Apart from doubt and mystery, beliefs in God or archangels or the infallibility of the Pope or the exclusive guardianship of Christian truth by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland[1] can be as irreligious as militant atheism or smug indifferentism.

By confessing their sense of wonder and mystery in face of propositions which the world commonly accepts or rejects without question, Christians provide themselves with a common tongue in which to interpret their doctrinal and epistemological Babel. Not only do they immediately experience a unitive bond more significant than their

[1] This is a very small body which considers even the "Wee Frees" too lax in matters such as "Sabbath observance." One of its adherents, told that some "Wee Frees" were as narrow as anyone, replied, "Maybe aye; *but we have the truth.*"

doctrinal disruptions, more meaningful than even their mutual excommunications; they engender further questioning at a still deeper level. Were the Roman Catholic to testify more to his sense of profound mystery and wonder at the elevation of the Host, the Quaker would not only learn more about the Catholic doctrines of Transubstantiation and the Communion of Saints, but would also question whether the true doctrine of the Inner Light were as simple as he might have supposed. By working on such lines denominations would find that they were becoming more reconciled to one another even in the act of believing their own tenets more thoroughly. Schism arises from credal impoverishment: it is by enrichment of one's own beliefs that one acquires enough life to be ingrafted into the Vine. The situation is indeed the reverse of that depicted by George Tyrrell when he wrote:

> "As the branches of the tree bifurcate and diverge, they grow more characterized and unlike one another. So of the varieties of the religious idea. They do not converge towards, but diverge from, a point of sameness. Schism is their very law. So far as they are alive and and vigorous, each pushes forward in its own direction and away from others: reunion becomes less and less possible. The tendency towards reunion among the Christian sects of today is the result of weariness and decay; of scepticism as to the values of their several systems. The withered branches break off at their point of bifurcation. Union is restored by going backwards to an original state of indetermination."[1]

This theory does not explain why the vigorous branches die when they do, instead of becoming, as might be expected, more and more lively. Nor does Tyrrell's analogy hold. "Sameness" is a slippery word: the branches of a

[1] George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1910), p. 233.

tree such as he describes bear the "same" kind of foliage and the "same" kind of fruit and therefore cannot be said simply to diverge from "a point of sameness." Their divergence may be more illusory than their convergence; at any rate there is no reason for supposing that the latter is less real than the former. The more life there is in a branch the more "sameness" the branch presents in relation to the tree: it is the naked, withered fragments that look most different. Life generates unity, though not uniformity.

It seems to me to be peculiarly significant that, apart from the fact that it might include the Orthodox Churches and Rome, an œcumenical conference such as I have in mind would be a graver menace to the adversaries of Christendom than is that kind of conference which talks more about belief than doubt. The chief enemies of the Cross, than whom none better appreciate the primacy of ideology and dogma, are now usually more afraid of Christian councils on work than they are about councils on belief. In 1937 the Nazis allowed German delegates to attend the Edinburgh Conference on Faith and Order, but prohibited such attendance at the Oxford Conference on Life and Work.[1] But if members of œcumenical conferences addressed themselves more to questioning their convictions than to getting new ones ready made, a common faith might be exhibited before which the enemies of Christ would have reason to tremble more than ever they have done at news of conventions on practical policy or enterprise. I am not saying that this common faith is not already in some way present within Christendom, but only that it is undeveloped, being too often stifled and otherwise undermined by lack of doubt.

It has ever been recognized by the greatest religious prophets that there is no more infallible guide for the people of God than God's voice speaking through persecution. Not

[1] This Oxford gathering proposed to consider the problem of Church and State.

even Pope or Bible can compete with such authority. It is worth pondering that even in Rome and after 1870 no Pope *could* speak *ex cathedra* against a widespread faith emerging in a persecuted Christendom. But whence comes this unrivalled authority which purifies, invigorates and enriches faith, if not from the stimulation of doubt, self-questioning and a sense of wonder and mystery? Such is the arrogance of conviction among many Christians today that it is not surprising to find them more prone to wonder in the presence of a new kind of can-opener than before any sacrament. Doubt, involving self-questioning and the disposition to wonder, is generally as unwelcome as persecution itself—it is the doubts which the Christian Gospel raises that makes this Gospel "offend"—but where genuine faith is in bud its life never suffers through yielding to the touch of genuine doubt. It is less to be regretted that Christianity is persecuted, even that Christians persecute one another, than that this is done ineffectively. To do it effectively Christians must learn to persecute themselves; that is, let their doubt persecute their faith. This is the way to that kind of reconciliation which is in the long run most truly unitive. The Christian doctrine of the Resurrection, for instance, becomes an arrogant conviction except in the hands of those whose own faith has been crucified by doubt. To many Christians there may seem little difference between doubt-sifted faith and their own dogmatism. But failures are often due to what might appear to be a negligible discrimination: only a failure to discriminate between waves one of which is 1/120,000 of an inch longer than the other prevents a colour-blind person from distinguishing red from green. It is only refusal to vivify our faith by doubt that stands in the way of a Christian reconciliation that might lead to the *Pax Christiana*, the only "peace in our time" for which it is meaningful for a Christian to pray.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN MYSTERY

"CANST thou by searching find out God?"[1] asked Zophar, one of Job's "miserable comforters." Reproaching these for their arrogance, Job elicited a further question from Eliphaz: "Hast thou heard the secret of God? And dost thou restrain wisdom to thyself? What knowest thou, that we know not? What understandest thou which is not in us?"[2] A masterpiece of Hebrew literature and somewhat reminiscent of a Greek tragedy, the Book of Job, from every point of view notoriously difficult, raises a philosophical problem and has even been likened to a philosophical dialogue. Job was wiser than his friends; but whence comes his superior wisdom? They, like him, were impressed by the mystery of God; indeed, it was their reproach that he was impatient concerning it. Yet we are to understand that Job, in spite of the rebellious thoughts for which God in the end rebuked him, probed deeper than they, and out of his terrible doubt was born a faith which showed that he had been all the time not less but more impressed by the divine mystery than they. The poet's main purpose seems to have been the emancipation of his readers from the dogma that exact retribution is to be expected in this life. This dogma Job's friends do not radically question. He is led to do so through a bitter personal anguish in which his profound moral sincerity plays an important part.

The deepest religious doubt is not that which is content to question one dogma in order to replace it by another hardly less dubitable; rather is it that which faces deeper mystery. Religious revelation, which presents, not answers,

[1] *Job* xi. 7 [2] *Idem*, xv. 8–9.

philosophical problems, is revelation of mystery; Job, beholding mystery more fully than did his friends, was in the end acceptable to God. Christian revelation is convincing not in leading to dogmatic conviction but in exhibiting deeper mystery: this is the deepest kind of conviction which genuine religion knows. Christian revelation is claimed to be full and final only in the sense that is is claimed that in the Person of Christ there is offered unbounded scope for the contemplation of mystery. Because this revelation is revelation of mystery it must conceal as well as reveal. It is noteworthy that Dr Barth recognizes that the revealed God is also the hidden God,[1] no less inscrutable[2] because through revelation unveiled. Revelation which put an end to mystery would explode religion, and to seek such revelation is the height of irreligion. The doctrine of the Incarnation is at once the supreme revelation to Christian faith and Christianity's deepest mystery. If we have understood the nature of faith, that paradox should hardly surprise us.

The worthlessness of that kind of faith in which the implicate of doubt is absent or undeveloped is seen not only in the resulting lack of sense of mystery but in its failure to make any profound moral demands. It knows nothing of the "offence of the Gospel." We are reminded of Clarence Day's amusing picture of the religion of his father:

> "He had noticed when he was a boy that there were buildings called churches; he had accepted them as a natural part of the surroundings in which he had been born. . . . As he grew up he regarded them as unquestioningly as he did banks. They were substantial old structures, they were respectable, decent and venerable. They were frequented by the right sort of people. Well, that was

[1] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Eng. trans. by G. T. Thomson of the Prolegomena to the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*; Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1936), p. 368.

[2] *Unenthüllbar.*

> enough. On the other hand he never allowed churches—or banks—to dictate to him. He gave each the respect that was due to it from his point of view; but he also expected from each of them the respect he felt due to him. As to creeds, he knew nothing about them, and cared nothing either. . . . As to living a spiritual life, he never tackled that problem. Some men who accept spiritual beliefs, try to live up to them daily; other men, who reject such beliefs, try sometimes to smash them. My father would have disagreed with both kinds entirely. He took a more distant attitude. It disgusted him when atheists attacked religion: he thought they were vulgar. But he also objected to have religion make demands upon him—he felt that religion too was vulgar, when it tried to stir up men's feelings. . . . And if he had ever found the Holy Ghost trying to soften his heart, he would have regarded its behaviour as distinctly uncalled for: even ungentlemanly."[1]

Here is a fine portrayal of irreligion. But had it not been widely taught that religion was intended to *explain* mystery, such irreligion would not have so readily flown religion's flag. It is the widespread absence of mystery among Christianity's adherents that has made many of them far more irreligious than many of those who now prefer to be labelled "agnostic." The attitude of many of the latter towards religion is much less irreverent than that of those Christians who, no matter under what denominational banner, contrive to have religion without mystery, wonder or doubt.

While it is true that some denominations are by their ethos more prone than others to repel mystery and wonder, none is exempt. The tendency to explain rather than contemplate mystery is a failure which we might call, after the manner of Kierkegaard, a failure of Christendom. Dr Lowrie's genuine insight into the mind of that unique

[1] Clarence Day, *These were the Days* (Reprint Society, 1946), p. 152 f.

religious thinker is never more acute than when he points out that "Kierkegaard's pamphleteering attack on the Established Church (of Denmark) was only a skirmish in the great battle S. K. was waging. When he brings suit against 'Christendom' we can none of us escape with an alibi; for this term embraces us all, whether Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, Romans or Orthodox, whether we belong to a 'free' Church or an 'established'—and not least of all if we are vague Christians of a modern sort whose religion is indistinguishable from the prevailing culture of a particular period and nation."[1]

But there is a widespread contemporary interpretation of Christianity which makes the contemplation of God as an inscrutable and inexhaustible mystery singularly uncongenial to those who adopt it. Unaccustomed to be confronted with any authority other than their personal prejudices about religion, they feel that the notion that the Gospel should be intended to offend, that it must be, as Kierkegaard called Christianity, "the deepest wound that can be inflicted upon a man,"[2] is blasphemous, as indeed it is—a blasphemy against their presuppositions. They form churches, groups or other religious societies modelled on the pattern of independent secular clubs whose constitutions or articles of association, binding their members as little as possible to any doctrine, are, generally speaking, intended to leave these free to determine from time to time almost without hindrance what is to be believed. Notoriously, this means that, enslaved to their own presuppositions and prejudices, and scarcely troubled by mystery, wonder or doubt, they impose dogmas on themselves with greater tyranny than could be attributed to any Pope or Presbyter. If they run Sunday Schools, it is they who dictate the doctrinal programme. If they hire a pastor or preacher, it is his duty to

[1] Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 535.
[2] *Idem.*, quoting Kierkegaard's *Efterladte Papirer*, p. 23.

do their bidding: on all matters of doctrine theirs is the sovereign will, the supreme authority. They prescribe how they shall be married, how buried; they even publish bulletins or magazines to keep themselves informed, during their frequent absence from the meetings of their society, whether everything is being done in accordance with their will; and they crown such devoted irreligion by calling themselves liberal Christians. In the ordering of their spiritual life they more truly assume omnipotence than does Parliament in the affairs of State, under the British Constitution; for they are Parliament and People combined. Since they are constituted a divine "college" of an odd pluralistic religious philosophy, they can (it has been done) humourlessly propose, second and resolve upon motions for the ordering of, say, the procession of the Trinity according to their pleasure. This is no lightheartedly made or whimsical indictment. I have myself asked a representative of such a tradition whether he did not think that God should have a vote at such assemblies, only to receive the sanctimonious reply that of course God should have a vote. Not content with thus enfranchizing God, such people almost always exhibit extreme hostility to anything in religion which they feel they cannot understand. One of the great achievements of the Reformation, they say, was the provision of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer or other such work in a language "understanded of the people," and they go on to ask of what use could be anything in religion that cannot be understood by its adherents. Religion must be as clear as noon, wholly wonderless, within the compass of their minds. If there is a question of love, it must be love such as they can understand; if symbolism, symbolism they have themselves conceived; if morals, theirs. Everything in their religiosity, its ethics, its theology and its art, are of their own choosing and design, and the only human challenge to the total complacency of a person

nurtured in such a wonderless tradition is the voice of the majority against his own idiosyncracies. But herein he generally finds only a modicum of mystery which, though it may irritate, rarely induces in him even the semblance or self-questioning; and if it does he has only to sever his connection with the offending society and join another more congenial to his taste. From the standpoint of doubt-sifted Christian faith it must appear that he might be spiritually better off a pagan, for as such he might perhaps have a greater chance of being confronted with the agnosticism from which it is the purpose of his organized religiosity to shelter him.

After all, against what in paganism does Christianity chiefly protest? The pagan has an inadequate sense of mystery. He has, for instance, no sense of sin in the Christian meaning of the term, and therefore no sense of the mystery which springs from that Christian experience. Yet pagans and crypto-pagans are not wholly sheltered from agnosticism. Even those Christians whom one may be tempted to dub crypto-pagan, for their efforts to have the best of both worlds, can hardly be said to escape mystery altogether. They may be playing at being Christian; yet it is just possible that, like Goldsmith's scoffers, coming to play they may be led to pray. Where there is even the slightest sense of mystery, nothing is impossible. Professor Lord David Cecil says of Robert Herrick: "Essentially he was not a Christian but a latter-day pagan; cheerfully innocent of a sense of sin, delightedly abandoning himself to the pleasures of fancy and the senses. He lays his little garlands of rose and daffodil on the altar of the Virgin as gaily as a classical shepherd making a libation to Aphrodite. But they are very pretty garlands: and their curious mingling of the Christian and the pagan gives them a piquant perfume all their own."[1] This is from a Christian point of view by no means a satisfactory situation; but it is not quite a hopeless

[1] *Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (Oxford University Press, 1940), p. xx f.

one. Herrick tries to come to terms with both paganism and Christianity: reprehensible indeed; but were not his Christianity to some extent genuine there would be no need for him to come to terms with it. There is some tension, some wonder, some doubt, and it is not impossible that these might be somehow profitably invigorated. The kind of bogus Christians about whom I have been writing have cunningly avoided such tension by inventing a Christianity of their own. That Jesus should have claimed to be God surprises them but little, since he seems to them to have been making only a more individualistic version of their own claim. For they band themselves together to worship the sum of themselves at what they determine to be their best. It is difficult not to construe such proclivities as a ruse to achieve self-inoculation against Christian doubt and to escape thereby the contemplation of the mystery of God.

The religious problem can in no wise be understood apart from mystery; it is this that makes the problem what it is. Lack of a sense of mystery in a student of religion, whether philosopher or psychologist, handicaps him as much as lack of a mathematical sense handicaps a person approaching a mathematical problem; as much as lack of road sense handicaps him in tackling a road traffic problem. So long as one has a road sense one may make a show at understanding a traffic problem even though one be incapable of driving a car. I think it may be that it is likewise unnecessary to have that kind of personal faith in Christ that is commonly expected of a professed Christian, in order to be competent to handle certain psychological and other problems which Christianity, as a religious phenomenon, presents; but at least one must have in some measure the agnosticism implicit in Christianity in order to be aware of even the nature of the religious problem. One must know, at the least, what Christianity "is about."

The ingenuity of many people, sometimes acute thinkers

in their field, in trying to evade such agnosticism, naturally raises the question why they should trouble to achieve such evasion. By getting out of agnosticism they escape having to consider the religious problem as this in fact presents itself. Were this problem illusory, what need could there be for such subterfuge on the part of a competent thinker? The leaders of the psycho-analytical movement, for instance, have hardly touched the religious problem at all. They need not have touched it, for they have plenty of other work to do; but that they should disguise it before touching it is a phenomenon that cries out for investigation. No psycho-analyst has shown a temper more reverently agnostic about the claims of religion than that which Jung exhibits. One particularly welcomes in him the agnosticism which relieves his work of the vulgar errors disfiguring the work of so many other writers when, as does he, they attempt to discuss the "inner structure" of Catholicism and Protestantism, respectively. Yet, on closer inspection, how genuine are his protestations of agnosticism? In his Terry Lectures at Yale,[1] Jung often seems to be striving to show great fairness in dealing, as a psychologist, with the religious problem. As a psychologist he finds himself confronted with an experience, the religious experience, which it is his business to examine empirically, for the religious experience is a phenomenon, and methodologically Jung is above all else a phenomenologist.[2] This sounds an admirable proceeding. We are not to be dogmatic: we are to be agnostic, a counsel after our own heart. But we are at only the fourth page when we find that we are being committed to the startling dogma that "religion, as the Latin word denotes, is a careful and scrupulous observation of what Rudolf Otto aptly termed 'numinosum,' that is, a dynamic existence or effect, not caused by an arbitrary act of

[1] C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (Yale University Press, 1938).
[2] *Idem*, p. 3.

vill."[1] Two pages further on we are informed that by the erm "religion," Jung does not mean a creed. Again our iopes are raised, only to be shattered by the next sentence:

> "It is, however, true that on the one hand every confession is originally based upon the experience of the numinosum and on the other hand upon πίστις, the loyalty, trust and confidence toward a definitely experienced numinous effect and the subsequent alteration of consciousness: the conversion of Paul is a striking example of this."[2]

That πίστις, for example Paul's, is to be defined thus is precisely what is *denied* by Christianity. The New Testament says that Jesus Christ spoke to Paul on the Damascus road.[3] Unless the account is a lie, the Christian experience of Paul was that Christ spoke, not that there was "a careful and scrupulous observation of what Rudolf Otto aptly termed 'numinosum'," and the experience of other Christians in reference to the recounting of the supposed event is that what matters is whether Christ spoke or did not speak, not whether there was or was not "numinosum." It may be that Paul was suffering from a hallucination; it may be that the account is a lie. Let us then examine the experience, determined to be agnostic about whether the account of it is a lie or not; but let us see that we are examining the right experience, and, if need be, the right lie. It is important, in taking evidence, that lies as well as other statements should be correctly recorded.

So Jung shows, as we suggested, considerable fairness in dealing with his problem; only, it is not the religious problem. Before his agnosticism comes into play he renders it harmless, so to speak, by substituting for the religious problem with which he purports to deal, another problem arising out of a very specific and peculiarly dogmatic interpretation of what religion is. What happens to the genuinely Christian reader of the book on discovering such

[1] C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (Yale University Press, 1938), p. 4.
[2] *Idem.* p. 6. [3] *Acts* ix. 5.

sleight of hand in the opening pages is something like this: knowing that Jung could very competently have applied himself to the religious problem, and yet makes certain of evading it, such a reader finds that the book deepens his sense of mystery in a curious way. "Here," he says to himself, "is a man whose agnostic temper attracted me to him in the hope that he would somehow explain, enrich, shake, shatter or otherwise be relevant to the faith which overwhelms me. I am disappointed; yet though he is irrelevant to the affirmative, believing aspect of my faith, he is not at all irrelevant to the sense of mystery implicit in this faith. There is more of this sense of mystery, it is true, within my faith itself than I can find anywhere in such a book. It may even be that there is more profound religious doubt in the Bible than in any modern treatise on the psychology of religion. But the discovery of Jung's agile sleight of hand somewhat unexpectedly confronts me with such a strong suggestion that the affirmative aspect of my faith is justified, that in the religious problem within me I have to put Jung on the affirmative side of the balance. It is only indirectly that he has helped me to wonder. One might have hoped that he would have fed my Christian doubt; but in fact he has fed my belief, leaving me to consider for myself the doubt implicit in my faith so fortified." Indeed, so far as this doubt is concerned, the Christian rarely if ever gets any help from the so-called agnostic onlookers; he is left to do all the hard work himself.

It is because such so-called agnostics refuse to entertain for a moment even the hypothesis that a Christian's sense of mystery is genuine that they so conspicuously fail to take part in the dialogue which is going on, implicitly at least, within Christian faith itself. They persistently write as though Christianity and other religions claimed to dispel mystery as one might dispel a fog, whereas it is the first concern of religion, notably of Christianity, to make us aware that

there is a fog, rather than to clear it away, and in religion we can never get away from this fundamental element in it. By "revelation" Christianity does not mean simply making something plain; both clarity and fog are revealed. Were clarity only revealed, revelation would end Christianity, whereas, rather, it begins it; that is, if it were simply a question of making God plain, and if revelation achieved this, it would put an end to religion by putting the recipients of the revelation beyond religion. If the Catholic account of heaven be correct, there is no religion in heaven; at any rate nothing that could be called religion without intolerable ambiguity. Nothing is revealed to the beatified; nor have these any religious faith. They have no faith because they see God face to face; to the extent that they see God face to face they cannot have faith, if only because this implies doubt, and one cannot doubt that which one so directly apprehends. In religion we do not in such a way directly apprehend God as a datum of immediate consciousness. He is said to reveal himself to us in a mystery. We may even say, to help us to avoid confusion of thought here, that the Christian revelation is twofold: it is the revelation to us of God and it is the revelation to us of mystery. But these "two revelations" are inextricably interwoven, so that we cannot respond to the one without in some way responding to the other, and cannot respond to either without responding somehow to both. In religion "we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery."[1] Deacons, Timothy is reminded,

[1] 1 *Cor.* ii. 7. The Greek word for "mystery," *μυστήριον*, means "a secret." Initiation into "the mysteries" generally meant learning "the secrets" of a cult, so that the mysteries ceased to be mysteries. But that is theosophy, not religion; Gnosticism rather than religious agnosticism. Christianity does not initiate into mysteries; it reveals these to be mysteries, so that that which appeared not to be mysterious appears now so to be. Christian apocalypses unveil the *presence* of mystery; were it otherwise the Apocalypse or Revelation with which the New Testament concludes might be expected to be the easiest, whereas it is notoriously the most difficult book, even for the most learned exegetes.

must be men "holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience:"[1] the faith *is* a mystery apart from which Christianity would be inconceivable. That which most strikingly distinguishes the genuine Christian from those persons who, with some gnostic arrogance, style themselves "pure agnostics," is the sense of mystery, which in such persons is as feeble as their doubt is superficial.

When Christianity degenerates into an attempt to preserve Christian faith without wonder it shows itself to have become a perversion and a self-caricature. Even were it possible to exclude wonder from Christian faith and preserve in any way the life of the latter, it would be a grisly achievement, somewhat like making a human skeleton live. The wonderless irreligion that passes for Christianity among those who have known none better is indeed like a skeleton more or less cleverly manipulated with string so as to give the illusion of life while differing *toto cœlo* from the living reality. The grimmest part of the caricature refers, not unexpectedly, to the most wonderful of the fruits of grace, *agape*, love. The remark of a young man invited by his parson to come to church ("I'll be glad to come so long as there's no *fellowship*") draws our attention to the degradation of this once beautiful word. As soon as religion is deprived of the sense of mystery, its love becomes more hollow and horrible than anything else in the world that has ever assumed that name. That petty bickering and sordid intrigue, nowhere in Christendom wholly unknown, are specially characteristic of certain sects, is not due to the numerical limitation or insularity of these sects, as is sometimes supposed, so much as to their lack of the contemplative attitude, their want of the sense of mystery in the presence of faith born of genuine anguish and vivified by genuine doubt. The peculiar kind of uncharitableness which is the fruit of such wonderless irreligion masquerading as Christianity

[1] 1 *Timothy* iii. 9.

may be found wherever there is the irreligion and t masquerade, and that this should be frequent among certa kinds of sectaries is not surprising, since their sectarianism notoriously due to humourless lack of doubt and the co sequent stifling of all sense of mystery.[1] Only where th

[1] I cannot imagine that this may be anywhere better exemplified th in the annals of the eighteenth-century Scottish Seceders, than wh there can hardly have been more wonderless and humourless sectaries the history of Christendom. Their insatiable appetite for obstinat bitter and dreary disputes about the questions which matter least to liv Christian faith in any age may be discovered from a not easily obtaina work in two large volumes, Dr. Robert Small's *History of the Congregati of the United Presbyterian Church from* 1733 *to* 1900 (Edinburgh, David Small, 1904), where the tale of a century and a half of unremitting charitableness, suspicion and strife, is told in nearly fifteen hundred clos printed pages, often flamboyantly and always heavily without a vestige conscious humour, yet it would seem very frankly, though in the pref to the second volume Dr. Small says that the bitterest complaint he recei concerning the first was that he had not always been frank enough, esp ally about clerical wickedness. Here are some very typical passages:

"Seven months of discomfort followed at Dundee," runs the entry an "Antiburgher" Secession church in that city, "the malcontents be on the alert, he (the minister) says, so that if he inculcated forbearance minor points 'he was a latitudinarian,' and if he enforced brotherly love was giving them 'Independent trash'" (Vol. 1, p. 287). This minis we read, was deposed for "scruples" in 1768 and ultimately found him in a civil court acknowledging guilt "as the respondent in a case of morality" (*ibid.*, p. 288). Of the "Burgher" Secession church at Saltco Ayrshire, we read that about the end of the eighteenth century, "Ot four years went past, and again . . . commotion, minister and people drawing well together." Then, "At this meeting three of the members were dealt with for disparaging . . . and circulating reports . . . while (the minister) was admonished for . . . saying that 'the one half of congregation were ignorant and the other half sceptical'" (Vol. 2, p. 3 In the "Relief" Secession church at Bellshill, Lanarkshire, we h "irritation," "a chasm of personal estrangement," "discomfort among people," "characteristic bitterness," "strained relations," "want of cumspection" and "some fierce writing" (Vol. 2, p. 223 f.) all withi few years and recorded quite casually. The occasion of such strife often more trivial than one would readily believe: a Mr. Smith was cal to an "Antiburgher" church in Aberdeen, "but owing to want of harmo the call was put aside. Mr. Smith's English accent . . . was objected to . (Vol. 2, p. 10). Many congregations seem to have been in turmoil fo century on end, almost without respite. "Matters went on at Kinro

sense is richly developed, with the accompanying sense of humour to which I have in an earlier chapter alluded, can the *koinonia* thrive, having the beauty of contemplative worship and the glow of fellowship as kindred yet incomparable joys.

Lively curiosity, far from being incompatible with a sense of mystery in religion, is the latter's natural accompaniment.

(a "Burgher" church) "very uncomfortably year after year through the workings of a factious spirit." Here, towards the end of the eighteenth century, "confusion was intensified" There is a complaint about a visiting minister (described as "the worthy man") being so drunk on a "communion afternoon" that he was "seen to stumble in his walk." Scandal enough, one might have thought; but no: the incumbent's wife "was credited, baselessly we should hope, with having drugged the wine cup of which Mr. —— partook before proceeding to the tent." Years after, "The spirit of contention had not yet laid itself to rest" (Vol. 1, p. 386 f.). Indeed, when the spirit of contention was anywhere enfeebled for a short time, the circumstance is thought worthy of comment: "the storm was over now" (Vol. 1, p. 383) or "Contention was now at an end . . . but other difficulties emerged" (Vol. 1, p. 352). Sometimes it helped a congregation to have recently had a special bout of strife: "Dundee had the turn of the balance in its favour over Perth owing to 'the disappointments they had met with and their present harmony after very threatening animosities'" (Vol. 1, p. 289). Occasionally the controversies had a theological air. In the "Lifter Controversy," for instance, the "lifters" insisted that "the lifting of the elements before the consecration prayer was essential to the right administration of the communion ordinance." The "Antiburghers" at Beith, Ayrshire, were among the congregations which this controversy "turned into a troubled sea." "After warm disputings" there was "a variety of abusive language;" there were "false aspersions on the Moderator;" someone "went off in a fit of passion." But the narrator throws light on the whole subject when he says that the scenes recalled experience of this controversy elsewhere and that "those who engaged in it would listen to no instruction, hear no reasoning, bear no contradiction" (Vol. 2, p. 529 f.). Here is a clue to the explanation of the Scottish Seceders' distinguished record of unmitigated uncharitableness. Devoid of doubt and humility they had no sense of mystery. To have listened to instruction, to have heard reasoning, to have borne with contradiction, would have been intolerable to people whose corporate existence depended on such unprofitable strife and had no other means of sustenance. It can also be demonstrated that they came to *expect* orgies such as we have described, as though the absence of uncharitableness were a sign of enfeebled life.

It is the child's sense of mystery and wonder that rouses its curiosity about religion. The so-called "scepticism" of some of its elders is often but apathy due to lack of curiosity which in turn is due to the withering of their sense of mystery. Too many such people affect to say they have "begun to think" when in fact they have only ceased to wonder. It has for long seemed to me very remarkable that so many people suppose that the suppression of imagination is a necessary antecedent of profound thought. After all, very small children make more striking intellectual progress in five years than their parents will make in fifty, and their remarkable sense of mystery and wonder is not unconnected with this advance. In a helpful study of the religious development of small children,[1] Miss Dorothy Wilson has shown how religious doubt may begin at a very early age, as early as the third year.[2] Many adults have ceased to wonder about questions such as this writer quotes ("Who made God?" and "If I'd gone upstairs could God make it that I hadn't?") simply because they have ceased to wonder at all. In them wonder has given place to a catalogue of presuppositions which make the continuance of their religious education virtually impossible. Such is their affliction that even their bare presence among children, as every one who in the least understands children knows well, temporarily inhibits the vigorous development of wonder in the children's minds. It is said that C. L. Dodgson ("Lewis Carroll"), who used to keep crowds of children spellbound with wonder-tales in his rooms at Christ Church, went as dumb as an oyster as soon as a grown-up person happened, on such occasions, to intrude. Too many adults have ceased to be capable of genuine religious education because their sense of mystery and wonder was already on

[1] D. F. Wilson, *Child Psychology and Religious Education* (London, S. C. M. Press, 1945).

[2] *Idem*, p. 67.

the decline before they reached puberty. Still vigorous enough to allow them to be educated in some narrow ways, but too feeble to permit their religious education to proceed much further, it is gradually extinguished, leaving them with the religion of a young teenster crystallized in their adult minds into a more or less imposing array of dogmatic presuppositions. It seems to matter little whether these be dubbed beliefs or doubts; what does matter is that there is no genuine faith/doubt antinomy, and therefore neither genuine doubt nor genuine faith. Nor is there much prospect of their experiencing either the one or the other intensely enough to cope with the religious problem at all. It is the distinguishing mark of all deeply religious minds that they have somehow escaped that fate. In lively Christians, the sense of mystery which has from the first pervaded both their faith and their doubt is enriched, not diminished, with every triumph of faith.[1]

[1] Gerard Manley Hopkins once complained to Robert Bridges:

"You do not mean by a mystery what a Catholic does. You mean an interesting uncertainty. . . . But a Catholic means by mystery an incomprehensible certainty . . . the clearer the formulation, the greater the interest. . . . There are three persons, each God and each the same, the one, the only God: to some people this is a 'dogma,' a word they almost chew, that is an equation in theology, the dull algebra of schoolmen; to others it is news of their dearest friend or friends, leaving them all their lives balancing whether they have three heavenly friends or one—not that they have any doubt on the subject, but that their knowledge leaves their minds swinging; poised, but on the quiver. And this might be the ecstasy of interest, one would think."

(*The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Oxford University Press, 1935, p. 187 f.) The whole letter, written from Stonyhurst in 1883, is peculiarly interesting.

CHAPTER XIV

CHRISTIAN DOUBT AND THE MYSTERY OF LOVE

We began our discussion by examining the nature of doubt and its place in faith, which has led us to consider doubt as a heuristic principle enabling the Christian to discover, face and contemplate the mysteries with which he is in doubt-sifted faith confronted. Doubt may at first but help us to replace one dogma by another purporting to be less dubitable; but at length the radical application of it leads us to the contemplation of mystery. Such mystery is implicit in all Christian faith.

The mysteries of faith cannot ever be fully unravelled till we are beyond faith itself; nevertheless faith purports to contain within itself a foretaste of the unravelling. From this we may go on to say that no real distinction lies between faith and mystical experience; only, in the latter the mystic finds his faith opening out into a vision which is still rooted in his faith. The mystic's privileged vision is but a fleeting glimpse, however much more vivid, of that which is already somehow beheld in faith. The mystics, who claim to have enjoyed this more vivid glimpse, unanimously testify, however, that the most radical and impressive element in their mystical experience has for its analogy human love,[1] the most mysterious of all the "ordinary" experience of humanity. Even the mystic beholds mystery in which there is both darkness and light, concealment and revelation; nevertheless he claims immediate awareness that the root of all the mysteries of faith is itself a mystery,

[1] I have examined this question at length in *Aesthetic Experience in Religion* (Macmillan, 1947), especially in Chapter VI (pp. 154 ff.).

divine love. This is but a corroboration of that which faith apprehends after its own fashion. The mystic is trustworthy only to the extent that he claims to behold divine love as a mystery: it is when he purports to behold it free from mystery that he is rightly suspect. For when his favourite analogy, human love, is bereft of mystery it ceases to be an analogy. Betrothal and marriage are characteristic terms used by the mystic to symbolize the last steps in mystical union with God; but they would be dismally inapposite apart from the mystery they are intended to imply.

Indeed sex is and always has been an analogy of religion, and it is the Freudians who have been chiefly responsible for the spread of the popular notion that the connection went almost unnoticed till Freud pointed it out. The mystics stressed it long ago; but only because they saw both religion and sex as mysterious. It is when either is shorn of mystery that the analogy becomes absurd or else simply breaks down through the virtual identification of religion and sex. Apart from mystery, sex is sordid and religion morbid. Wonderless religiosity is morbid whatever form it may take, and likewise no sexual behaviour, conventional or not, can be other than sordid when it is divorced from all sense of mystery. Both sex and religion conspicuously tend to evoke extreme conventionality on the one hand and on the other violent protest. They are notoriously yet very deeply and genuinely controversial subjects—controversial in a sense different from that in which politics, say, are controversial. The conventions are attempts to conserve, the protests to recover, mystery. They are often very crude attempts; the conventions tend to destroy that which they were intended to conserve and the protests to lose that which they were meant to recover; but to the extent that they express recognition of mystery they are from a Christian standpoint respectable. What is not respectable is any attitude, be it in the guise of protest or of convention,

which tries to circumvent the mystery or render it innocuous. Between sexual licence and extreme conventionality there is generally that kind of affinity that we have already noticed between fanatic and worldling. Without a sense of mystery sexual purity is impossible because apart from mystery there is no love that is not wholly egocentric and therefore immoral: the basis of impurity is irreverence before the mystery of sexual love. It is because wantonness is not wonderful enough in the literal meaning of the term that it is so contrary to the Christian spirit. It must be confessed that, as we saw in an earlier chapter, popular religion has grossly distorted the sexual ethic of Christianity; but it has exacted less, not more, than the Christian ideal, which demands a purity of heart virtually unattainable by those in whom the sense of wonder and mystery is all but extinguished. Children *are* "pure," *pace* Freud, not in having no sexual life (a discredited superstition) but in having, as a rule, a more vigorous sense of mystery than the majority of adults.

That *eros* is the ground of *agape* has never been denied within the Catholic tradition, and fewer Protestants than formerly would seek to think otherwise. But it has to be said that this does not mean that the one is nothing but a form of the other. From the datum, "*A* is the origin of *B*" we can deduce nothing at all concerning the nature of either *A* or *B*, and even if we knew the nature of *A* we could still claim practically no knowledge of the nature of *B*: orchids have their origin in the earth, but a knowledge of the properties of soil reveals to me practically nothing about the nature of orchids, and it is only in such a sense that *eros* may be said to be the ground or origin of *agape*.

Since the experience of love is more mysterious than any other, it is not surprising that we should find Christian doubt peculiarly relevant to Christian love. So also is faith which we have seen to be nothing if not personal: in all

love there is faith, faith in the beloved. In human love there is doubt about both one's own love and that of the beloved. In Christian experience of the love of God there is extreme doubt; but the situation is peculiar. The Christian experience of God's love is experience of a love which wholly surrounds and completely overwhelms us in such a way that it becomes a datum of consciousness more immediate than even awareness of our own existence. In the most intense experiences of this kind doubt about God's love may be practically vanquished during the experience; nevertheless, there remains abundant doubt concerning, for instance, the adequacy of our response and our ability to withstand the impact of God.[1] Moreover, the mystery of the whole situation remains. We find faith engaged in open war with doubt, and growing more and more aware that the victory to her arms is due in the last resort wholly to love. Yet should doubt surrender in this war, faith is at once impoverished, and the experience of love gradually fades away. The war cannot cease for the Christian, so far as ordinary earthly experience goes: the most profound Christian testimony is that we must fight to the last ditch against an overpowering love, in the knowledge that we cannot win. This accords so well with Augustinian theology that it would seem hardly even paradoxical to Christians apart from their Pelagian presuppositions. Grace is irresistible, yet our will is free; we hide, but we are found by God; we doubt, yet his love vanquishes our doubt.

It is the mystery of God's wooing us that makes it necessary for us to resist, doubting, even in the arms of irresistible Grace.

[1] Such doubt is not eliminated by any sense of assurance of divine aid. According to the mystics, doubt persists in all stages of the mystical union except the final one, which is so near, they say, to celestial beatitude that it can hardly concern us in ordinary philosophic discourse about human experience.

I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
. . .
Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.
Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet.[1]

The anguish of Christian agnosticism is unique. Knowing from the start that his doubt is already beaten, the Christian knows no less that he must doubt or else doubt will go unconquered. His agnosticism differs from other kinds in that, immediately aware of "the following Feet," he knows that at any rate they are ultimately inescapable, and yet because he is caught in the divine love he is forced by his own nature to try to elude them. This would be *not* mysterious but wholly incomprehensible outside the Christian experience, except for the analogy of erotic love, in which the mystery of *agape* is dimly foreshadowed whenever *eros* is not depraved by lack of the sense of mystery and wonder. It should shock no one to discover this link between *eros* and *agape*, for it is hardly surprising that that instinct which, when illumined by a sense of wonder, most effectively drives the focus of our attention beyond self towards another finite *person*, should be the earthly basis and analogue of our response to the divine love. It is very misleading to say, as people often do, that erotic love is "natural" to men and women: this suggests that it is natural to them, and not a reversion, to be beasts; which is demonstrably false, since it is only with the greatest difficulty and after a

[1] Francis Thompson, *The Hound of Heaven* (*Oxford Book of Modern Verse*; Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 54 f.

long process of adaptation that *homo sapiens* can even begin to imitate the habits of his remoter ancestors without making himself look ridiculous to his own species. What *is* "natural" to men and women is erotic love charged with a sense of its mystery—a very different case. It is this that is analogous to *agape*; and it is the anguish of *this* human love, unknown to the lower animals, that is an analogue of the mystical anguish of Christian experience.

Grounded in mystery-laden *eros*, yet bearing a mystery more unfathomable than *eros* is capable of bearing, *agape* is a mystery indeed. It is the indispensable and characteristic mystery borne by the ideal Christian community: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not *agape*, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."[1] But where is the Christian community in which there is more than a welcome flash here and there of the indispensable *agape*? Why should genuine Christian faith be afraid to confess the tragically evident circumstance that the disposition typical of the average Christian society, far from being *agape*, is not even a propitious type of *eros*? The typical disposition of popular Christianity is neurotic rather than erotic; that is, *eros* is developed or manipulated in such a way as to lead to a dead end, a neurosis which is spiritually sterile, in contrast to the illimitably fruitful *agape*. Let this be said: it is a less ferocious way than Kierkegaard's of presenting the unpalatable truth which he preferred to express by saying that "Christianity does not exist." The proposition that popular Christianity may be a worse disease and deadlier enemy than even materialism[2] or atheism is not offensive to lively Christian faith, except by reason of a gross misunderstanding that by

[1] 1 *Cor.* xiii. 1.

[2] That materialism is Christianity's chief enemy is an old-fashioned error. The modern State clashes with Christianity by reason of its secular mysticism, not its materialism, which need not be radically unchristian.

"popular Christianity" is meant the Christianity of a particular class, such as the unintellectual. On the contrary, the learned are frequently its victims; for "popular Christianity" does not mean the Christianity "of the people" or of any class of people, but rather an accommodation, illicit and unprofitable, of Christianity to the prejudices of people, whether they be learned or ignorant, rich or poor.

The practical difficulty of understanding or appreciating the nature of Christian principles is much more artificial than we generally care to suppose. The artificiality of the difficulty is cleverly exposed in Kierkegaard's Parable of the Polar Expedition.[1] In this parable the Christian life is likened to an expedition to the North Pole, an enterprise fraught with the gravest danger and involving unparalleled sacrifice and courage. The notion of such an adventure is attractive to the majority, at least, of mankind; yet comparatively few seriously contemplate setting forth upon it; nor are there likely to be many who will be persuaded to contemplate it seriously. Nevertheless, reading or hearing about such adventures is inadequate for the satisfaction of the urge in the human heart to set forth upon them. Unscrupulous charlatans are quick to see all this, and also to invent what purports to be a solution. They point out, plausibly enough, that the essence of adventure is not attaining one's objective but endeavouring to attain it; plainly there are glorious failures. What matters, then, is to make an endeavour in the direction of the North Pole. There is a man who lives in Copenhagen, for instance; let him be encouraged to travel to London and back. It is only a little way, and he may have gone first class by the regular steamer; yet, the ingenious charlatans argue, it was an endeavour in the direction of the North Pole, less glorious than some, but nevertheless to be accounted something,

[1] Kierkegaard, *Efterladte Papirer*, p. 502 f., quoted by Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 546 f.

and after all nobody has ever actually reached the Pole.[1] Even to take a hackney coach to the park on a Sunday afternoon, provided only that one chooses a northerly direction, is an endeavour. So, say the charlatans who profit from such sophistry, "we are all making an endeavour" to be Christian; it is only a question of degree; few people have the "religious temperament" to understand and appreciate the situation fully.

The relevance of this parable to the case of *eros* and *agape* is not hard to find; nor is its relevance to our central problem. *Agape* can be discovered only by doubt-sifted faith, which is extremely delicate and complex; and for this is commonly substituted bunches of dogmatic presuppositions. Such is the nature of the human *psyche* that by a sort of psychological sleight of hand it is quite capable of affirming or acquiescing in pairs of virtually contradictory dogmatic propositions. For instance, one may often find on analysis that a particular individual is convinced, or believes himself to be convinced, both that the power of *eros*, being evil and degrading, perhaps indeed humanity's chief shame, must and can be overcome, and that the power of *eros*, being an overwhelming force, cannot be overcome. The result of this exceedingly common psychological conjuring performance is neurosis in the deluded spectators as well as in the performer, and consequently neuroses are extremely common in just that kind of society which should be most free of them. Christian experience shows that the active, present, humanly manifested influence of *agape* can not only tame but genuinely transform *eros*; but *agape* is not to be attained easily. It does not come naturally to mankind. Its attainment is impossible without the exercise of vigorous doubt and deep reverence before the mystery of love. Here, if anywhere, the catastrophic results of dogmatism may be seen, and Christendom's extreme need to pray for Christian doubt.

[1] Kierkegaard was writing in mid-nineteenth century.

Christendom is by no means guiltless of the world's charge against it of having tolerated, even encouraged, conventional caricatures of the Christian attitude to *eros*. But the most hypocritical sexual ethic of all is that which emerges when legislators try to appease both the rival dogmatisms of perverse Christians and of their antagonists.[1] It is because a great many Christians have too often and for too long refused to approach such questions reverently and humbly enough that they have been able to cling to grossly immoral conventionalities in the hope that these might somehow shelter them from the moral obligation of the Christian doubt implicit in their faith. One would not wish to run

[1] The notion that England's Golden Age of hypocrisy about such questions was the Victorian is inaccurate. A little scrutiny shows that the Victorians have been made the scapegoats for a much more radical disorder. That Queen Victoria was on the throne for fifty years before she permitted the legally "innocent" party to a divorce suit to attend her court (see *The Queen's Journal*, 10 May, 1887) is hardly remarkable apart from the context of the anomalies in the English divorce law of the time. But this was even more anomalous afterwards, as one post-Victorian example must suffice to show.

The Matrimonial Causes Act, 1857, which made it for the first time possible though still very expensive to obtain divorce in any circumstances without a special Act of Parliament in each individual case, provided that a man might divorce his wife on proof of her simple adultery on one occasion, while a woman could divorce her husband only on proof of his habitual adultery or for adultery specially aggravated, for example by grave cruelty, long desertion, or incest. But not only did this startling anomaly remain law till the passing, a generation after Victoria's death, of the Matrimonial Causes Act, 1923; a less well known refinement was invented in 1907. Until the passing of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act, 1907, marriage with the sister of one's deceased wife had been incestuous and therefore of course illegal; the Act, by way of appeasing secular dogmatism, made it no longer so. Nevertheless, by way of appeasing dogmatism from the other side, it explicitly continued the rule that all sexual relation by a man with his living wife's sister was incestuous. Consequently, in addition to the other existing anomalies, arose the further one that after 1907 a husband divorced for incestuous relations with his wife's sister might after his wife's death legally marry the woman with whom he had committed incest. This is typical of the kind of situation which arises when there is dogmatic compromise, with a pragmatistic motive and without any genuine wonder or doubt.

the risk, even, of undervaluing the genuine sympathy and care which, through the wonderful power of *agape*, many Christians have exhibited towards outcasts who outside Christendom would have got scant justice; but on the other hand the cruelty of many Christians towards Christendom's own outcasts, notably perhaps its illegitimate children, has not yet sufficiently moved the Christian conscience on the whole. This is so because of lack of *agape*, and had the *eros* of Christendom been on the whole less wonderless it would have been more readily transformed into *agape* than deformed into neuroses which result in incalculable evil to Christian society. The situation is acutely psycho-pathological; the Behaviourist is quick to appreciate this, and for him the matter rests there. The Christian is precluded by his profession from resting in such an attitude, and yet too often he not only fails to cope with the situation morally, but fails even to appreciate what it is. Christian faith must always fail when it is made spurious by the immoral neglect of its implicates of doubt, mystery and wonder, and nowhere does it fail so dismally as in face of the mystery of love.

Agape is, as St Paul noticed, "greater" than faith, in the sense that nothing so fully and clearly indicates the genuineness of the Christian faith of a community as the quality of its love. Yet it is only to the extent that the faith is doubt-sifted that the quality of the love can be appreciated. It is very important that the traditional Christian view about the source and nature of *agape* be not misunderstood, for apart from this context *agape*, itself a traditional notion, has no specific meaning. A brief delineation of this context is therefore desirable.

According to Christian testimony, *agape* is the direct gift of God; it cannot be spun out of humanity. It is made available to humanity in the Church, the Body of Christ. Because God is there outpouring it, it is there for all to behold and enjoy. It may, however, be said that in some

sense, at least, the books in the British Museum are also there for all to behold and enjoy, except to the extent that the visitors are impeded from doing so, for example by blindness, illiteracy, or a preference for sixpenny novelettes. Ophthalmic treatment and educational facilities may be provided; but their success cannot be guaranteed. People may even be compelled by Act of Parliament not only to become readers at the British Museum but also to take full advantage of all the treatment and facilities so offered; they may be encouraged by bribes and threats to profit by these advantages; but they can no more be compelled to profit by them than they can be compelled to think. Christianity teaches that God, unlike the British Museum, does more than all that, providing not only the gift to be beheld and enjoyed and all the equipment necessary for removing every conceivable impediment to beholding and enjoying his bounty, but even the psychological capacity for this; powers of imagination and will, for instance. What is not provided is the act of imaginative or moral response itself, for were this provided, as it could be provided, the imaginative percipient and moral agent would be none other than God, just as the thought provided for the victims of the propaganda of a totalitarian State is not theirs but someone else's. The thought may be excellent; only, whatever it is, it is not the victims'. Nevertheless, provided that the propagandists have been efficient, the victims will believe the thought to be theirs. God withholds nothing, says Christianity, but this deception; yet it is a consequence of the withholding that many adequately endowed to do so, do not adequately exercise their imagination and will. This is plain enough. What is less readily appreciated is that it is not necessary that such a deception be perpetrated on me by someone else: I am quite capable of deceiving myself. I may fancy, for instance, that I am thinking when in fact I am only permitting imagery to pass through my mind as I

gaze into the fire; I may suppose that I am engaged in the æsthetic contemplation of a Degas when in fact I am but allowing the agreeable sensation of his delicate assembly of colour and other impressions to assist the physiological process of digesting a good dinner that I have just consumed; and I may very well make myself believe that I am making a genuine effort to catch my train, though I might have run twice as fast without detriment to my heart, had I not wished rather to excuse myself for giving myself another half-hour with a pleasant companion or for depriving myself of such a period with an unpleasant one at my destination. Likewise I may believe that I am responding to God's love though in fact my love for him is no more notable than my love for apple dumpling.

There is hardly a greater insult that one could offer to a man or woman than to confess a love about equal in quality to one's love for apple dumpling. Cordial hatred would be more complimentary than that. For the acceptability of love depends on the quality of the wondering reverence that is in it. The lack of this in the love of self-centred parents for their children, for example, is notoriously a source of the unsatisfactory filial response of the latter. Such parents do not in fact believe that their children are independent persons, and in expecting filial response they are therefore expecting something which they have already tacitly affirmed to be impossible, since only an independent person can respond in such a way. People whose belief in God is wonderless can offer him only wonderless love, which is a blasphemous outrage. It would seem indeed that it would be less insulting to God to write obscene blasphemies on every corner of the crucifix than to love him without wonder; to say, for instance, "O God, of course I love thee," as though loving God were as unremarkable a phenomenon as loving Gorgonzola cheese.

Yet this is the only kind of love which can be offered in

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